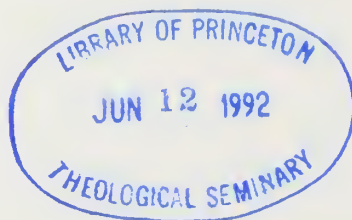


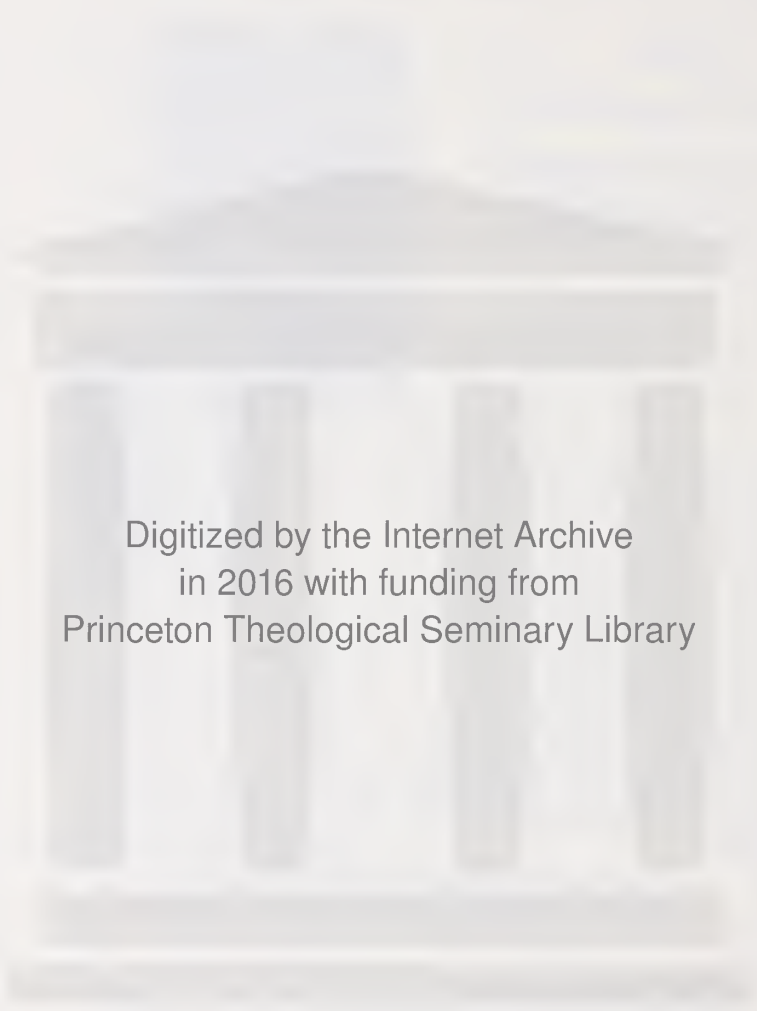
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THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

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Daniel L. Migliore, EDITOR

Jane Dempsey Douglass, BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

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Because the policy of the Bulletin is to publish lectures and sermons by Princeton Seminary faculty and administration, and presentations by guests on the Seminary campus, we do not accept unsolicited material.

In Honor of Charles C. West

CHARLES C. WEST, Stephen Colwell Professor of Christian Ethics at Princeton Seminary, will retire at the end of this academic year after thirty years of distinguished teaching service.

Born in Plainfield, New Jersey, Professor West holds degrees from Columbia University, Union Theological Seminary in New York, and Yale University. An ordained Presbyterian minister, he served as a missionary in China, as a fraternal worker of the Presbyterian Church in Germany, and as a Director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, prior to his appointment to the Princeton Seminary faculty in 1961. From 1979 to 1984 he served as academic dean of the Seminary.

Dr. West has been a member of numerous committees of the WCC, the NCC, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including the committee that prepared the Confession of 1967. He has served as President of both the American Society of Christian Ethics and the American Theological Society.

Among the ten books which he has written or edited are *Communism and the Theologians*, *Outside the Camp*, *The Power to Be Human: Toward a Secular Theology*, and *Ethics, Violence and Revolution*.

Contributors to this issue appropriately represent the global range of Professor West's commitments and contributions in Christian ethics and Christian mission. In her conversation with her husband, Ruth West has provided us with a fascinating sketch of his career.

We are delighted to dedicate this issue of the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* to "Charlie," winsome Christian scholar and teacher, tireless advocate of reconciliation, and esteemed colleague and friend.

DANIEL L. MIGLIORE
EDITOR



Charles C. West

An Ecumenical Journey: A Conversation between Ruth and Charles West

by RUTH C. WEST

Like that of her husband Charles, the life of Ruth West has been an ecumenical journey. Daughter of Arthur L. Carson, who served as a missionary in China and President of Silliman University in the Philippines, she received her undergraduate degree from Barnard College and her doctorate from the Teacher's College of Columbia University. She also studied with such teachers as John Bennett, Paul Tillich, and Ursula Niebuhr. Until her recent retirement, she chaired the education department at Monmouth College.

IN THE FALLING dusk of a warm Spring night in 1942, a lanky Columbia senior, majoring in political science, slipped into the quiet quadrangle of Union Theological Seminary. The pressures of his college experience had been heavy. He remembers that "at the end I broke down in sheer exhaustion from the effort of trying to promote all good causes and stand for all good things. It was then I realized that our value as human beings, my value as a human being, was not in what I could accomplish, not in my virtues or something like that, but the fact that there is an overwhelming and forgiving love of God which reaches into my life and which upholds me regardless of my own failures and weaknesses and sins." This realization played a major role in his decision, made that evening, to enter the ministry.

Four years later, having completed his Bachelor of Divinity and a post-graduate year of work in Ethics at Yale, he was ordained into the Presbyterian ministry and almost simultaneously commissioned by the then Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., to go to China as a missionary.

In the following conversation, I asked him to reflect on the people and experiences that have had a significant influence on his life.

RUTH WEST: In 1967, in your inaugural address, you linked mission and ethics together. Can you tie these in with your career's heavy emphasis on the ecumenical movement as well?

CHARLES WEST: Yes, I think I see three elements in your question: ethics, ecumenical fellowship, and mission. I tried to demonstrate in that inaugural address that Christian ethics has a missionary context. It is the effort to be faithful to the reality of Jesus Christ at work in the world, and, in being faithful, to bear witness to it. I don't think that there is or should be a separation between the words we use to proclaim the gospel and the way we live in response to the gospel. The one should point to the other. The

things we do are not good and exemplary always in themselves. But if they point beyond themselves to the one whom we obey and to whom we respond in our fallible and sinful way, then the witness is borne.

RUTH WEST: Let me ask a follow-up. In *Outside the Camp* you say that the church is missionary in its very existence, and that from the church Christ's love and power flow out into all other human relationships. Is that perhaps how you link ethics, mission, and ecumenics together in one witness?

CHARLES WEST: Yes. History is not closed. Communities are not self-sufficient. Those that close in on themselves become pockets of enmity toward other communities. In the long run it is the community of Christian believers united in Christ which undergirds all other human communities, because the church is the one community that depends finally not on the goodwill or the virtue or the special affections of a particular group of people, but on the love of Christ which binds us all, which forgives us all, which gives the whole world new life. In that community, then, other communities—communities of the family, communities of the nation, neighborhoods, and working groups—find their place, their significance, and their inspiration. So the reality of the church bearing witness to other communities about their true openness is, I think, the very heart of Christian mission.

Let me give you two examples: one out of the far-distant past and one fairly recent. When I landed in China, I was very much aware that we were Americans in a country undergoing profound suffering and profound revolution. Many of the things that were said about Americans in those days were unfair. We were blamed for almost everything that was wrong in China. When the Communists came into power, America was a symbol of the whole imperialist power from which the country needed to be liberated. But I soon found out that it was not a Christian witness to try to defend America. It was my witness to listen to my Chinese friends and colleagues, to sympathize with their situation, to point beyond that to the reason why we were there, which was simply to serve the God who is their savior and ours, and who offers hope, forgiveness, and new life to us all. So, if you like, the Christian mission, or at least my part in it, was a mission of repentance for national and social sins and an attempt to point to a gracious God who gives life meaning beyond our human conflicts.

Another example, much more recent. In Christian-Marxist dialogues we have often found ourselves in ambivalent situations. How far can we trust our partners in an East European country, knowing to whom they may have to report? How far can they trust us not to manipulate them for western

propaganda purposes? Establishing trust as a basis for dialogue is the first problem to face. We do it by trying to understand each other as persons behind the ideologies and powers that condition us. Then we can move to a second level, inquiring about the reality each of us confesses in this relation with one another. Truth does not emerge from winning the argument. It comes from mutual witness. It is a matter of inviting another person to see the world in the context of the ultimate reality which we confess, and of listening when they do the same for us. I remember a comment by a well-known partner in this dialogue, Professor Milan Machovec of Czechoslovakia who once said, "I don't trust a Christian who isn't interested in converting me." That's exactly the point. Not converting in the sense of manipulating, but in the sense of wishing with all our heart and soul that the partner in dialogue might understand the reality which motivates and controls us.

RUTH WEST: It seems to me that the ecumenical movement has always had a special influence in your life. Why is that the case?

CHARLES WEST: Well, let me go back a bit. I became a Christian out of my experience with the ecumenical movement. I was in the unbelievably fortunate situation of being a member of the University Christian Association at Columbia during a time when we were receiving a stream of visitors from overseas who were real leaders of the church and spiritual guides from whom one could continually learn. We could call Reinhold Niebuhr across the street from Union Seminary anytime. D. T. Niles came through. Robert Mackie came through. In the end Visser 't Hooft came through. One could go on to name others. One was continually aware that one was part of a worldwide Christian community which was living by faith, and bearing its witness in the most diverse situations on both sides of the battleline in the Second World War, in places like China and India, Indonesia and elsewhere. I remember reading the *Student World* in that light. Robert Mackie's travel diaries were especially illuminating. He would visit a part of the world, talk with Christians there and bring out in his report the character of their faith, the kind of problems they had, what they were praying for, what dangers they were subject to, and above all their sense of being upheld by the prayers and the fellowship of the church around the world. I was converted to the Christian faith as an intellectually respectable and spiritually powerful ecumenical movement in the world. Therefore I decided to join a particular church, to study theology, to seek ordination to the Christian ministry, and to become a missionary. My commitment to the local

church has always been a function of my awareness that it is part of that worldwide Christian community.

So, of course, I constantly sought wisdom and insight from the ecumenical movement, and tried to meet people who were involved in it. I wrote a long and passionate letter, I remember, from China to M. M. Thomas, who was then a secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, and who had written something in the *Student World* that I both agreed and disagreed with. So started one friendship. When we left China, and only one part of our first term as missionaries was over, we asked to serve in Europe, and had the enormous good fortune of spending some time in Geneva, then going to Germany where the people with whom we lived were also a part of this ecumenical movement, and knew it. The *Oekumene*, as the East Germans called it, was a reality to them in their daily Christian witness to a Marxist-Leninist society in a way that simply isn't the case in the United States. There I learned to sense what it meant that the church ecumenical and the local church were supporting and strengthening each other.

A qualification, however: a particular program, a particular person, a particular office in the World Council of Churches never lived up to the ideal. I learned to understand that there is a movement of the Holy Spirit in and through the ecumenical movement which is not to be identified with the sanctity or the wisdom of any particular leader or with the success of any particular conference, but is present with us all, informing, inspiring, and correcting us from beyond. I discovered that to be the case in all the years we were in Bossey. I'm sure you felt it, too. Many of the conferences were not particularly successful in reaching human agreement—about theology, about social policy, or even about the Bible or the form of worship. But something always happened because, disagreement or no, we studied and prayed together. We did so, questioning and challenging each other on every level—theology, politics, Bible study, and even forms of worship. We learned from that questioning and confrontation because we were surrounded by the confidence that the word of God had something to say to us which is beyond us all. That's the reality of the ecumenical movement, and that's what I felt was happening at Bossey, at least in the years I was there.

RUTH WEST: When you entered seminary, you did so with the goal of becoming a student pastor. Winning the traveling fellowship in your senior year made it possible for you to spend a year at Yale in graduate work. Why did you select ethics as your focus of study and as your life's work?

CHARLES WEST: Because my questions always, from the very earliest years

right on to today, have been more ethical than metaphysical. Not truth in itself but true understanding of human relations with each other and with God, truth in the sense of what is hopeful, what is promising, what is redeeming—this has been the object of my search. I have mentioned that I came to college all fired up to try to reform the world, and it was a long time before I learned that there is a certain pride in being ethical that way. But it means that I came to the Christian faith by way of ethics, asking about what is right and what is good, what will redeem the world, what gives us hope, and where the power is on which one can really count.

RUTH WEST: You learned both from your experiences and from the people with whom you studied. I noticed in reading *Communism and the Theologians* that you were working with the ideas of many people under whom you had studied. How did these people influence you as you began then to deal with the theological problems that have been your lifelong interest and concern?

CHARLES WEST: When I was a college student, Union Seminary was the Mecca of theological thought and the point of vision from which one could look out over world Christendom. Reinhold Niebuhr was the first real theologian with whom I came into contact. Well, not quite, because as a college sophomore I wrote a paper on Christianity for a course in the philosophy of religion with Irwin Edman. I read lots of liberal theologians, and Edman said when he handed it back, "Mr. West has struck a doughty blow for liberal Christianity." But it was Niebuhr's insight and Niebuhr's dialectic that pushed me theologically a step further.

When I got to Union, however, there's no doubt about who was the greatest influence on my thought. It was David Roberts. His course on the philosophy of religion led me step-by-step through all the complexities and problems of philosophy up to the point where I could see philosophically that revelation was respectable. I remember the rejoicing with which I discovered that fact. Roberts was a believing philosopher who agonized over the problem of unbelief. That's just about where I was at that point. And it helped me. It brought me intellectually into the Christian faith.

Reinhold Niebuhr was quite a different matter. He was brilliant. He was overwhelming. The first few lectures were completely beyond me until I began to get the rhythm of his thinking. I will never forget the time I raised my hand in class and asked something—I've forgotten what it was—and Niebuhr looked at me and said, "That's a very profound question." And then he proceeded to make it profound by the way he answered it. He was,

in that sense, enormously encouraging, helpful, and, I always felt, humble, although one of the characteristics of his humility was that he never stopped to think that the force of his opinion might be overriding somebody. He was just too humble to think of himself as being that big. Paul Tillich was also influential. I took the history of philosophy with him, and like everybody else was amazed at his brilliance, his insight, and the way in which the dialectic of his mind worked. I never really became a Tillichian, partly I think because my struggle was too intense for his system. He was a reconciler. He wanted to reconcile theology and philosophy. His own childhood experience was a too-dogmatic Lutheran pastoral household. Mine was a too-liberal secular home. I wanted to know more intensely what was true, what I could proclaim, what I could believe and give my life to. That was not his major problem. That may be one reason why Tillich's philosophy, although fascinating and useful and helpful in many ways, was never my ultimate guide.

Then there was John Bennett. The clarity and the simplicity and the toughness of his mind always impressed me. But I remember most of all his personal encouragement and his willingness to enter into dialogue with a student as an equal. I can't say that I ever had much dialogue with Reinhold Niebuhr, certainly not with Paul Tillich, but with Bennett I had a great many conversations in which we explored things together. I think that's been the experience of many, many generations of students with him.

One other thing about John Bennett from much later. I remember my friend David Paton saying one time that when ecumenical history is written, one will have to take account of the quiet presence of John Bennett. In one ecumenical meeting after another, his suggestions gave form and structure to what people were thinking, drawing their ideas together in a report so that something solid came out of it. John Bennett was a craftsman, an ecumenical craftsman, and a sweet, encouraging, mediating spirit, and older friend.

I could mention others at Union who played a role, but let me go on to H. Richard Niebuhr, who was my principal advisor in doctoral study and to whom I owe more than to anyone else an understanding of what scholarship means. Reinhold Niebuhr was quick to admit he was no scholar in that sense of the word, and Tillich was too much of a *prima donna*. For Richard Niebuhr, examining someone's thought from all the angles, looking at it in an unusual light, delighting in the new perspectives and ideas that can come out of it—this was the great joy of learning, and he communicated it to all of us who were his students. He made us love reading the great

philosophers and theologians of history by the way he helped us think about them and by the way he thought with us. I never thought of Richard Niebuhr as a "great theologian," although in a way he was, but as a concerned Christian scholar, as one who opened the world of the mind to us, whose insight one could trust. That was his profound influence. I realize that in my teaching ever since then, especially on the Ph.D. level, I have more or less reproduced his understanding of what scholarship is, how students ought to learn, and how we ought to think about the great figures of history.

I was not able to follow him at certain points. He was so afraid of making an affirmation of faith that might be dogmatic and therefore express human pride rather than true obedience to the Lord, that he was self-questioning to a fault. The time when he really nourished us spiritually was when he preached. But that didn't happen very often. I think his hesitancy at that point was a wrong understanding of humility. It was more like anxiety, one might almost say, and I always disagreed with his disagreement with Karl Barth at just that point. But that perhaps is the other side of the great and sensitive scholar.

RUTH WEST: How have the settings in which you have worked influenced your thinking? Your experience in China, for example, came as the country was going through a shattering transformation. In fact, you actually spent time living under a Communist regime. In Europe you served in a church which had endured the war, and which was now facing the challenge of Marxist thought. Your experiences in these widely differing worlds surely had a profound influence on your life and faith.

CHARLES WEST: I'm not all that proud of my record as a missionary in China. I was very young and a lot more self-righteous than I thought. I was constantly trying to push people into argument or discussion beyond where they were ready to be pushed. I wasn't sufficiently sensitive to the very real menace of the communist world and the desperate efforts people were making to accommodate to it because they would have to live with it for the next 45 years, whereas I was able to leave.

Berlin was another experience. There I was really an apprentice. I was learning about the resources of the gospel for everyday life from pastors, church leaders, and from church members as they shared with me their life and theology in the face of communist power in a very special way. I was blessed to have had such teachers. The orientation and structure of my theology really goes back to those days in Berlin.

RUTH WEST: You went out to China with a strong sense of a missionary

calling, but with very little knowledge of what such a calling might involve. Can you describe how your studies and experiences in Asia and in Europe shaped your thinking about missions?

CHARLES WEST: The question of the mission of the church was not a high priority for any of my earlier teachers. They were thinkers in Christendom, and they were concerned, very much concerned, that Christendom should be faithful, but not as strongly that the gospel should be proclaimed throughout the world. But I felt that if the Christian faith is true, it is true precisely for people outside traditional Christendom. That is one of the main reasons for seeking service in overseas mission. I wanted to get out of the Christian context and to talk about the triune God in a non-Christian place, to non-Christian people, where it was something new, something exciting, something that would bring a new perspective and new hope to people who hadn't heard it for centuries.

The question of mission was on my mind all the time I was in China. It was certainly sharpened by the fact that China was taken over by a Communist government which was explicitly atheist in its orientation and which had very definite reasons for rejecting the Christian faith. I was searching at that time among Chinese Christians for what they thought the gospel was. I was disappointed that I didn't hear more from them about that. But I now realize that I was probably listening in the wrong way. I did hear some things which were hopeful and encouraging. But really in the forty-five years when communism was dominant, the Christian church survived among people who found a community of love and mutual caring in their relation to God in Christ that broke through the brutal regimented poverty of their lives. It was not an intellectual reality. They did not theologize much about it. But it was there, and it outlasted the communist dream. It was one answer to the question of mission which has been mine all my life long: what is the truth that is truly redemptive, which speaks to and corrects our distorted perspectives and insights, and points us to a new, healing reality in human struggles? How is Christ made known in such a way that we participate in Christ's redeeming work? I could discover how this was happening in East Germany day-by-day by talking with Christian people there. Much later, it became clear that, in different ways, it was happening in China, too.

In that connection, let me come back to Germany. I have to bring in two other great figures who are probably more influential in my thought today than any of the ones we have mentioned so far: Karl Barth and Dietrich

Bonhoeffer. What was it about Karl Barth that was so helpful to a church in a communist-dominated society? One word, I think, is key: freedom. The conventional wisdom was that a communist society is one of oppression, and as far as political and even ideological power goes, that was the case. But for the Christian the first reality in the world is not political power, it is the work of the risen Christ. That was the central truth from which one lived and in the light of which one then understood the power of communists, the power of their ideology, the economic and political forces which were at work. So one was free to exercise a ministry both to communist oppressors and to those who were oppressed by these new lords, who hated them, and who wanted to withdraw from their domain. Freedom from hate, freedom from fear, freedom to be constructive in a society which was dominated by an alien ideology: that was what the church in East Germany was learning from Karl Barth. So I knew I had to study his theology in the light of that experience. When I did so, I discovered that Barth had laid hold of the basic problem of the modern world: the problem of a human, self-centered struggle to realize a good society and then to incorporate God into it. *Kulturchristentum*, the Germans called it. Wars were fought in its name, sometimes against "atheist" communism, sometimes against other "Christian" cultures.

The basic message of Karl Barth was that there is no way by which human beings can think themselves up to God. When God speaks, when God breaks into our lives, something new comes in which reorients us entirely and saves us from having to think about ourselves, our own ideals, our own principles, and our own cultures. That's freedom. And out of that comes a whole range of new possibilities for human life in fellowship with God in Christ. This is, I think, the wonder and the joy of Barth.

Then there was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. That's a somewhat different story. In Berlin we had a little group called the *Unterwegskreis*, a circle of those who are "on the way." We were advertising the fact that we were not in firm and fixed positions. This group, some of the members of which were former students of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, were kind enough to invite me to share in their meetings. One of those was Eberhard Bethge, who was Bonhoeffer's closest friend, and who has been his editor and interpreter for these last forty years. He brought letters to that group. They were eventually published as *Letters and Papers from Prison*, and they were exciting. They suggested a whole new perspective on the modern world and the presence of Christ in it and for it. How does Christ take form in a world come of age, no longer dependent on the working hypothesis of God, a world free from

religious concerns and premises for a genuinely worldly responsibility? What is the judgment and grace of God in such a world?

We spent our time in that circle, as I have spent my time in years since, trying to get a hold on what Bonhoeffer really meant in all its implications, not only in those prison letters but throughout his writings and his ministry. If I were asked who my favorite theologian is today, it would have to be Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The reason is very simple: every time I go back to read him, I learn something new, I see a new perspective, I find myself challenged in a new way to look at the world and at myself in the light of God, in ways I hadn't thought of before.

Not only that, every time I teach the course on Bonhoeffer, I learn new things from the students who write papers and go through the same experience. His combination of affirming the world, and understanding Christ's presence in the world as one who serves and suffers, and in that serving and suffering is also risen—in other words, his perception of how the biblical story works in modern civilization—is endlessly fertile.

RUTH WEST: In addition to these "great theologians," are there other persons who influenced you greatly?

CHARLES WEST: Yes, let me mention three to whom I owe an enormous debt. They were my fathers in the ecumenical movement. One was J. H. Oldham. I met him in his old age. He had been secretary of the first World Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, chairman of the International Missionary Council, and principal architect of the Oxford Conference on Church, Society, and State in 1937. He was editor of the *Christian Newsletter*. When I came out of China in 1950, a report which I had written about the church there, based on my experience, fell into his hands, and he told the editor of the SCM Press that it ought to be published. It was, under the title *Christian Witness in Communist China* by Barnabas (pseud.).

But he didn't stop there. He invited me to a small conversation to which he also invited three or four other carefully chosen persons. We talked about China. We talked about the Christian faith and its relation to the events of the post-war world. And I came away from the conversation with my head spinning from all the new and different perspectives which had been brought out.

That was the first of a half dozen such meetings which Joe Oldham called, at which he presided, and in which he was the catalyst and we were invited to explore the frontiers of Christian faith. In my first years at Bossey, he brought a few of us together on theology and science, which first opened my eyes to that field.

Oldham was an explorer on the intellectual frontiers of the Christian mission, relating it to the major philosophical and social trends of the day, finding the persons who were the leaders in those fields, and bringing them together to talk with one another, always along with a few young learners like me. I was enormously privileged to have been allowed to take part in that process. It transformed my understanding of Christian mission. From then on I saw it, not just as the growth of churches in a non-Christian world, important as that is, but also as the relation of Christian faith to the major intellectual trends and problems as presented by the major thinkers of the day. That was Oldham, already in his eighties, but always on the frontier of Christian thought.

The second person was Visser 't Hooft. I was persuaded in a special way of the cogency and challenge of the Christian faith by reading in college a book of his: *None other Gods*. I knew him by reputation as a student leader, as an interpreter of the Christian faith, as an evangelist on the social and intellectual frontiers of his time. But it was by working with him on the staff of the World Council of Churches that I learned most deeply about the balance and poise of the ecumenical movement: the way in which differences are to be respected and yet never allowed to go unchallenged; the way in which the work of the Holy Spirit in quite different traditions from our own is to be understood and brought into the dialogue; the way in which the major philosophies and ideologies of the world are to be challenged: in short, the way the gospel is to be proclaimed in the ferment of post-Second World War Europe and the world.

Visser 't Hooft had an absolute genius for listening to the discussion in a meeting, then coming in and not only summing up, but taking us one step beyond toward new policy, new issues, and new directions. In a real sense he embodied the ecumenical enterprise from his position as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. There was a genius there which still needs to be captured and realized in the generation after him, if we want ecumenical dialogue and the mission of the church to be fruitful.

The third person is still very much alive and somewhat closer to my own age: J. Lesslie Newbigin. The first book of his I read was *A South India Diary*. It was simply the chronicle of his daily life as a newly-ordained bishop in South India, reflecting the interaction of the Christian message and the life of the Christian church with the culture and society of his time and place. Newbigin is a missionary from his very soul. He lives it. I have always listened to him hoping to learn how, myself, to capture something of that style, spirit, and poise in mission that he seems to come by so naturally. He also was one of those who tackled every intellectual frontier as it came

along and tried to make sense of it in terms of the Christian gospel. He told me that he liked my book *Communism and the Theologians*. I think it was because it showed him another frontier on which to work.

His greatness is in the combination of serious thought and faithfulness of spirit which runs through everything that he writes and everything that he says. I'm still learning how to be a faithful and intelligent Christian from the things that he writes and does, even in his old age, as he goes back to England and tries to tackle the question of the form of mission to Western culture.

RUTH WEST: I know that you have found working at Princeton Seminary to be a rich and rewarding experience, and you have often spoken of the privilege of working with its faculty and students. Can you comment on that and of other aspects of your work that have been equally rewarding?

CHARLES WEST: There are several different strands in the Princeton experience. One major strand was getting involved almost from the moment we landed on these shores, in helping the Presbyterian church to formulate a new confession of faith: the Confession of 1967. Our object was to prepare a teaching instrument that could be used by confirmation classes, and that would introduce people to the Christian faith for our time. It was not designed to be a system of theology. It didn't cover all the bases. It was a confession. If one were to be challenged by someone outside the faith and asked: "What do you believe? What is the Christian faith all about?," where would you start and what would you say? The Confession of 1967 was intended to help the believer respond. It did do that, I think, for that period and, in a way, for all periods. There is insight there which must not be lost, even though emphases may change: God the reconciler in Jesus Christ, and the implication of that reconciliation for the Christian life, for the mission of the church, and for the life of society.

Reconciliation was almost immediately attacked as being too mild a word. Is it a substitute for justice, for instance? Does it undermine the struggle for liberation? Not if you really understand it. Rather it puts the struggle for justice in a proper context: the overwhelming grace of God and therefore God's judgment on all that denies the character, spirit, and teaching of Jesus Christ. Reconciliation, in other words, involves dying and rising with Christ, surrendering oneself and finding oneself again. I think anyone who reads the Confession of 1967 will realize that's what it's about.

The committee worked together as a group and in the process I learned to appreciate the Presbyterian Church more deeply than I had before. On

the committee were pastors who brought their own experiences and working theology, college teachers, seminary teachers, and one ruling elder. We had some rough times. Some of us felt at times that our strongest convictions were being submerged in the group process. But on the whole we grew in spirit as a group trying to be faithful to the church, to one another, and to the way we were thinking together as we tried to discover the form of what we were constructing.

I know much has happened since then with which the Confession does not deal. Our understanding of the relation between men and women in the church and in society has changed profoundly. Problems of sexual ethics have been posed with more intensity than before. We are more deeply aware of our responsibility to God for the environment in which we live. But there is still a basic orientation in the Confession of 1967 which is a guide for faith and life.

To take another strand, the encounter with Marxism has played a fundamental role in my thinking through all of these years. In 1964 I was persuaded to go to the Christian Peace Conference in Prague. The year after that I was chair of a group that formed what was then the U.S. Committee for the Christian Peace Conference. I was a part of that wonderful, exhilarating bloom of Christian-Marxist dialogue in 1966-68 when some of the profoundest questions of difference between us, and the way in which we interact, were posed by dissident Marxist philosophers and Christian theologians together. That was, of course, crushed in 1968 by the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops. But through all of the 70s and the 80s we kept right on trying to cultivate relations wherever we could with the churches in Eastern Europe and with the people there, to support their ministry in any way we could. This is beginning to bear fruit once again now that the Marxism-Leninism of Eastern Europe has collapsed. We face a whole new horizon which we're going to have to explore in the next few years. I have ventured the conviction that although the Marxist-Leninist system is dead, Marxism is going to continue to be relevant and challenging in a number of ways. We are going to have to think as Christians more constructively about a social ethic because we no longer have the Marxist system to bounce off of.

Finally, there is the faculty of Princeton Seminary itself. It has changed enormously in the time I have been here. When I arrived, George Hendry was an intellectual guide and pillar to whom we all deferred, to whom we all referred. He just simply knew more than any of us did. Since he has left, the rest of us have developed a new and somewhat different kind of theo-

logical community which is ripening, I think, now. Dan Migliore, David Willis-Watkins, Dick Allen, Mark Taylor, and Sang Lee are five extremely different persons with different emphases, and yet somewhere in the place where they meet a new theological direction for the church is emerging. It's rather exciting to watch that happen. In ethics, mission, and ecumenics, things have also changed. It's a distinguishable field interacting with theology, of course, and the swings in it have sometimes been wild. Dick Shaull was an exciting colleague, stimulus, and dialogue partner as long as he was here. We are still wrestling with the radical challenge he represented. When he left, Sam Moffett came. That brought quite a different experience and perspective. Sam is an old friend. I have known him ever since we were housemates in China. It is an honor to count him, Dick Shaull, and Alan Neely, his successor, as friends and dialogue partners in defining the mission of the church. None of us can do it alone.

I remember Sam Blizzard with his extremely detailed and careful sociological knowledge and the depth and care with which he trained his doctoral candidates. One of my early intellectual treats was to talk to those doctoral candidates about the relation between the science of sociology, the science of theology, and the field of Christian ethics. We were constantly defining an important intellectual frontier there. With Gib Winter, the frontier was also there but it was more ideological. Gib was a sociologist with a very definite philosophy which interacted with his understanding of the Christian faith. Now, in Dick Fenn, we have another sociologist with another philosophical and theological orientation. This constant interaction with a discipline outside the theological circle is extremely important and fruitful, I think, for our whole enterprise. I am grateful to all of my colleagues who have questioned my thought and kept it moving, from that perspective.

Let me mention a more recent incident in this connection. When Dick Fenn and Peter Paris first joined the faculty, we had a retreat of the Church and Society Committee, in which we asked each other what our various convictions, disciplines, and orientations are. Besides Dick, Peter, and myself, there was Lois Livezey, Charlie Ryerson, and Bennie Ollenberger from Bible. We worked intensely for two years trying to define the Church and Society Program. We learned an enormous amount from each other about our emphases, our prejudices, our points of view, and we managed to work out a curriculum, I think, in which we all could meaningfully participate. I think that's an enormous achievement. It has bound us all closer and made

us understand each other more deeply in the community of the faculty than was my experience in the earlier years.

I could go on, of course. There are all my colleagues in the other departments. Let me say this in general. I have a feeling about the Seminary now that we are a closer, more understanding community of scholars and teachers than we ever were before. That doesn't mean that we always talk the same language, but it does mean that we can talk to each other and we can work out problems and questions together. So I guess this is a great time to be retiring and let the process go on.

Renascent Religions and Secularism in India

by M. M. THOMAS

An ecumenical leader and author of many books, M. M. Thomas was a member of the faculty of Princeton Seminary for several years. At present he is serving as Governor of the State of Nagaland in India.

I DEEM IT A PRIVILEGE to have been invited to contribute an essay to this Festschrift for Dr. Charles West as he retires from his professorship of Christian Ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary. I have had the joy of knowing him since 1947, the year I joined the staff of the World Student Christian Federation with responsibility for Asia. He was then a missionary in China. Later I had the opportunity to work with him in the WCC studies on ecumenical theological approaches to rapid social change in the modern world. He traveled to India, visited my home, and helped in the work of the Christian Institute for the study of Religion and Society of which I was Director. After my retirement, I was invited to join the Princeton Seminary faculty as guest professor for ecumenism and missions. As a colleague on the Seminary faculty for several years, I came to know Charlie and his family more closely. I have treasured his life-long friendship. So, it is a special pleasure to make a contribution to this volume published in his honor.

I have chosen a topic related to secularism, about which Charlie has made an impact on my thinking through the years. Of course, I am pursuing the topic in my Indian context. It draws on an unpublished paper presented on the "Concept of Secularism" at a multi-disciplinary national Seminar on Secularism in India at the Tara Institute of Social Science, Bombay, in September 1989. My aim in this essay is to explore the idea and structure of a healthy and viable Indian public philosophy of secularism. It should be noted that while a distinction is made between secularization and secularism in Western discussions, in India the word "secularism" is used for both concepts, and the distinction is made by pointing out the area of its application.

Not only in India, but the world over, there is a resurgence of religious fundamentalism and aggressive denominationalism (called "communalism" in India), which threatens the political, social, and cultural achievements of movements of secular humanism. This resurgence is in part backward-looking; but in part it is an attempt to go beyond a secularism which in the application of technical rationality has lost its democratic humanistic character and has become as dogmatic, closed, and authoritarian as religions in the past, and has also produced a spiritual vacuum by ignoring the transcendent dimension of community identity which traditional religion expressed.

This paper argues for what may be called a concept of open secularism, which can strengthen democratic secularism in India by its openness to reforming and renascent religion as opposed to revivalist religion. In my assessment, religious reform and renaissance are the result of religions absorbing within their concepts of transcendent spirituality a limited but real process of secularization. Since atheistic secular ideologies have also begun to recognize some limits to the secularization process and have become more sensitive to the need to protect the dignity of human life as well as the natural environment, a dialogue between these ideologies and reforming religion on the idea of secularism is possible today. It is also necessary if we are to save democratic secularism from being subverted by religious revivalism on the one hand and closed secular ideologies on the other.

I. SECULARISM IN THE WEST

Secularism is related to the process of secularization of corporate structures of life and thought, which has been an essential aspect of modern history. Since that history had its dynamic in the West, it may be relevant to start with the evolution of the concept of secularism in the West.

The structural aspect of secularization is the breakup of the traditional institutional integration of culture, society, and state with one established religion. In the West this came about as the result of the break-up of Christendom, and its linkages between church, community, and state. This process was accompanied by two affirmations of human freedom. The first was the affirmation of the autonomy of various areas of corporate life—science, philosophy, politics, economics, and culture—from the dictates of religious authority to follow ends and laws naturally inherent in each of them. The second was the establishment of the sovereign nation-state within geographical boundaries, with increasing recognition of legal toleration and protection of the plurality of thought, belief, and expression in society by the state.

The anthropological concepts behind these structural changes have been changing throughout the history of the modern West, beginning with the cultural Renaissance and Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, and the American and French revolutions of the 18th century. However, the general conceptual framework may be defined as a movement from a sacred to a secular ethos in corporate life. This humanist secularism had three features.

(1) First and foremost was the discovery of the sovereignty of the individual person and the right and obligation of each person to follow one's reason and conscience in the pursuit of truth—an idea which became embodied as

fundamental law in the constitutions of nation-states. This means that cultures and societies recognize individual personality as the only ultimate center of significance and that all other aspects of corporate life are only instruments of service to the human person.

(2) Accompanying this was the desacralization of nature, the idea of nature devoid of spirits, so that experiments with nature by technology would be possible without fear of violating the sacred order.

(3) Along with the desacralization of nature came the desacralization of social and political structures and laws. The idea of an eternally fixed sacred moral order or law to which society and state have to conform gives place to the idea that social and political realms are realms of secular human creativity based on empirical scientific analysis and technical planning, with human welfare as the only moral goal.

The desacralization of nature and laws of corporate life, the recognition of religious plurality, and the large role given to scientific and technical rationality raised the question of the character of religion in relation to nature and society. The Enlightenment and later the Feuerbach-Marx tradition included the following assessments: first, that religion is an illusion characteristic of the childhood of the human race, which will outgrow it with adulthood; second, that religion as the sanction of the oppression of individuals is the main hindrance to social progress; and third, that religion is an illusion organically related to our subhuman corporate consciousness as the reflection of the unfulfilled hopes and aspirations of humanity, and that consequently religion will wither away as revolutionary action establishes a just humanity.

Underlying these concepts of religion was an understanding of human nature and an interpretation of history first expressed in the idea of inevitable progress, and later modified in the idea of dialectical progress.

However, from the beginning there were movements of religious believers which took different postures on their approach to the secularization process. Some battled with it as an unmitigated evil; return to Christendom was the ideology of several Christian political parties in the European continent formed in opposition to the tide of the French Revolution. The Roman Catholic Church gave its official approval to religious pluralism based on the civil right of religious freedom only at Vatican II in the 1960s.

But there were also movements of religious reform which accepted a good deal of the critique of religion by atheistic secularism and welcomed the separation of religion and state as good, not only for politics and society, but also for religion. They welcomed the emergence of the individual per-

son's authority in religion as well as the desacralization of nature and law in the name of the principle that the Sabbath is made for humanity and not humanity for the Sabbath. They also understood religion to transcend the existing social and political structures and thus to be able to evaluate them critically. The Protestant spirit at work in the struggles of Free Churches in Europe and in the Pilgrim fathers in North America contributed indirectly to the creation of the idea and structure of secularism. It is significant that the constitution of the secular state of the USA has in it the clause that the inalienable rights of freedom and the equality of citizens have their sanction in the Creator God. This view was the result of a dialogue between atheistic rationalism and religious belief among the founding fathers. It affirms the conviction of religious believers that the respect for all members of society and protection of their human rights cannot be maintained without recognizing the sacredness of the human person. Along with the desacralizing of nature, politics, and society in the name of the sacredness of human beings, i.e., their freedom and creativity, the reformed religious sensibility posits that human persons have ends and loyalties beyond the state and society. Religious liberty becomes the guardian and guarantee of all human liberties.

Also in democratic secularism's concept of making political power responsible through checks and balances, there was the impact of the Calvinistic Puritan understanding of the essential corruption of human nature. This served to correct the ultra-optimism of the rationalist idea of progress. The idea that none can be entrusted with a monopoly of power but that the power-holder must be checked by law, custom, and the counter-power of the opposition is the result of the application of a religious insight to politics. Robert Bellah has pointed out that American secularism and its democratic civil loyalty in the context of religious pluralism had the support of the undercurrents of a "civil religion" that drew its tenets from the religious tradition. And in Germany under Hitler, it was the spiritual resistance of the Confessing Church that was the sustaining force for universal humanism. Albert Einstein once said that when the press, the trade unions, and the universities succumbed to Hitler, it was the religious resistance that had staying power.

In fact, in the twentieth century, the emergence of Hitlerism and Stalinism as ideological "theocracies" signaled the breakdown of democratic secularism. Today there are many who feel that the idea and structures of democratic secularism have no future. They can cite resurgence of religious fundamentalism seeking return to a religious theocracy, whether it finds expression in the Moral Majority movement in the USA, the Return to

Christendom groups in Europe, the Islamic revolution of Ayathollah Khomeini, or the RSS movement for Hindu Rashtra.

Countering these movements toward a religious theocracy, creative searches have arisen for ways to redeem the structures and values of democratic secularism for the future by relating them to a realistic understanding of the rational and spiritual dimensions of the human self made evident by twentieth-century history. For instance, there is the rediscovering in our time of the need to limit technological aggression on the natural environment by a greater reverence for nature. There is also a growing awareness of the need to redefine democratic secularism so as to affirm reverence for human individuality without either making individuality a law unto itself or giving in to collectivism. Finally, there is the rediscovery of the tragic dimension of the self expressed in the self-righteousness of good people and in the difficulty of the task of building up human hope for the future without giving in either to the idea of inevitable utopia or of inevitable doom as the natural goal of history. All these redefinitions call for a new understanding of the contribution renascent religion can make to a culture that supports a public policy of open secularism.

Neo-liberal social thinkers like Walter Lippmann and Robert Bellah, and Neo-Marxist thinkers like Bloch, Gardavsky, and Gramsci (along with Gorbachev's ideas of perestroika and glasnost) speak of the significance of the dialogue between religion and atheistic secularism to correct the tendencies inherent in them to create closed societies and to develop a body of insights of a secular anthropology which can sustain democratic secularism against the onslaughts of religious authoritarianism and secular totalitarianism.

II. THE CONCEPT OF SECULARISM IN INDIA

Against this background of the global concept of secularism, let us look at the concept of secularism in India.

Here the concept of secularism as a political philosophy emerged in the movement for national independence. The ideology of secular nationalism, which sought the inclusion of people of all religions in the struggle, had to battle against both Hindu nationalism and the Islamic theory of two nations. Though Independence came with the partition of India that established Pakistan, under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru India was successful in overcoming the tide of Hindu communalism to establish a secular state. The concept of the secular state in India, as it has evolved through the Independence movement, the Constituent Assembly, and the period after Independence has two very clear tenets:

(1) The declaration of religious liberty as a fundamental civil right of every citizen, making possible the common effort of different religious communities in the development of Indian nationhood and its expression in a democratic nation-state, without destroying or suppressing the diversity of our religious and cultural pluralism.

(2) The need for eventually transforming all traditional societies in the light of the democratic principles of freedom, equality, and justice according to the Directive Principles of State Policy that were adopted. That is, the co-existence of different religions and cultures should be interpreted, not statically, but in dynamic interaction with the modern democratic ideals of community living which we have accepted in common.

Relating to the first, namely, religious liberty, the Constitution has the following juridical provisions:

(1) The fundamental right of all persons equally to "profess, practice, and propagate religion," (2) the right of every religious denomination or any section thereof to "establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes and to manage its own affairs in matters of religion," and (3) the freedom of citizens from discrimination on "grounds of religion" with respect to any employment or office under the state.

Because the British policy offering safeguards like elections by religious affiliation and special provisions for economically and socially oppressed groups was interpreted as alienating them permanently from the mainstream Hindu community by building up special interest groups, there was general opposition to it. By affirming the fundamental rights of individual persons irrespective of religion, the Constituent Assembly aimed at delinking separate political rights from religious communities without endangering their religious rights.

In this connection it is interesting to recall how the right to "propagate" religion became accepted as part of religious liberty. The propagation of religion leading to conversion in the sense of change of affiliation from one religious community to another is not characteristic of "mystic" religions like Hinduism; but it is integral to "prophetic" religions like Islam and Christianity. Therefore debates on this topic in the Constituent Assembly were heated. Of course, propagation and conversion along with communal electorates and other political rights for religious communities can acquire a communal political color. Thus when the leaders of the Indian Christian community announced their decision to forego communal electorate or other communal safeguards, Sardar Patel enthusiastically responded by arguing for including the right of propagation as part of religious liberty. This

was a concept of religious liberty that went beyond the Hindu concept and related the idea of tolerating "real" difference in the realm of religion. And non-religious leaders like Nehru also welcomed it because if religious propagation and conversion are banned in law, that might lead to the eventual banning of cultural and even political propaganda and conversion. Of course, the religious liberty of persons as it now stands is a democratic concept and needs defense in any secular concept of the toleration of the plurality of religious and anti-religious ideologies. The debate on this question is still going on and the matter has to be looked at from the point of view of the future of democratic secularism in India.

Further, the co-existence and plurality of religious communities and cultures in the Indian concept of secularism is not an acceptance of their co-existence as static communities as in the traditional view. It is conceived as active and dynamic, involving the transformation of all social structures associated with the different religions, in the context of the new national commitment to build a new society based on liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice.

The fundamental rights resolution adopted by the 1934 Karachi Congress under pressure from Nehru and the Congress socialists was a milestone in this respect. It called not only for land reforms and other measures of economic justice, but also changes in the traditional social structure of extended family, caste, and village which had perpetrated injustices like untouchability and personal laws exploitive of women, with the sanction of religion. Therefore, the secular state of India never accepted the principle of a "wall of separation" between religious communities and the state which is characteristic of the USA concept of the secular state. It envisaged radical democratic legislative, judicial, and executive interventions into the life of religious communities to change oppressive systems and customs in positive response to the demand of the oppressed sections of these communities.

The Constitution of India makes the right of state intervention in the secular aspects of religion in the name of justice a part of the clause granting religious freedom. It states clearly that the right of the religious freedom of citizens shall not prevent "the State from making any law regulating and restricting financial, political, or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice," like restricting entry into temples and use of temple roads and facilities on any discriminative basis.

These new elements of Indian secularism which go beyond the traditional framework of toleration were a result of the impact of Western democratic and socialist secular ideologies, which envisaged the idea of a more egalitar-

ian society. There was political intervention in relation to traditional social laws from the beginning of the national movement. Untouchability was outlawed from the start by independent India. The state recodified Hindu law against the protest of Hindu communalism as well as Hindu religious authorities. Speaking of the Indian objective of forming a society in which "the difference based on birth, income, or position are not great," Nehru said:

In our attempt to achieve it, we want to put an end to all those infinite divisions that have arisen in our social life. I am referring to the caste system and other religious divisions, call them by whatever name you like . . . It is thus one of our objectives to get rid of them and give every individual in India an opportunity to grow, as also to build a united nation where individuals do not think so much of their particular group or caste but of the community at large.

So the changes were aimed at a relative detaching of the "individuals" socially from closed religious communities so as to enable them to relate to "the community at large" represented by the nation. Here the concept of Indian secularism envisages a measure of secularization of society for the sake of forming a national community on shared social ideals. Thus the concept sees the growth of "individualism," the sense of the "larger community," and the development of a "united nation" as interrelated and involving greater autonomy of society and social laws from the established authority of religions. The civil Marriage Act which the Parliament passed was in a sense the nucleus of a civil law transcending religious communities. This was the furthest India went towards evolving a common civil code.

III. RENASCENT RELIGIONS AND INDIAN SECULARISM

I would like to conclude this paper with a few notes on the role religions, especially the renaissance of the religions of India, have played and can play in the Indian concept of secularism.

(1) While toleration of religious and cultural plurality has gone beyond the traditional Hindu ideas of toleration, Hindu acceptance of a plurality of religious forms, as well as Hindu philosophy, mysticism, and spirituality with its vision of ultimate unity, have contributed greatly to the development of the new toleration of religious and cultural diversity, as all writers about Indian secularism have pointed out. In fact, Nehru was never tired of quoting the Asoka's Rock Edict No. XII regarding the toleration of different Dharma as the basis of the co-existence of religion at home and of ideological systems internationally.

(2) Nehru was sometimes criticized for initiating the recodification of Hindu law without touching Islamic or Christian personal laws. The answer to this criticism is that recodification of Hindu law had the sanction of Neo-Hindu movements led by reformers from Raja Mohan Roy through Vivekananda to Gandhiji, who sought to assimilate egalitarian humanism into Hinduism. Also the untouchables, women, and other weaker sections of Hindu society had been awakened by Hindu reform movements to the injustices they suffered, and Anti-Brahmin movements were challenging traditional Hindu laws. This made recodification of Hindu law possible. Within the Muslim community such religious reformation did not emerge in strength, and the enhanced minority consciousness after partition and the religious riots made them view both liberal reform from within and pressure for reform from without as threats to their religious identity. The Law Commission initiated a study of the reform of Christian law but stopped the process when religious heads opposed it, even though many groups in the Christian community supported it. The fact that when the law of equality between son and daughter in the share of intestate parental property was validated by the Supreme Court it was accepted without protest by the Syrian Christian community, shows either that the Law Commission was too timid or that the ruling party did not want to lose the Christian votes that the church leaders could deliver to them. The point I am making is that the introduction of secular egalitarianism in Hindu law was based on the support of a Hindu religious renaissance, and a similar sanction is necessary if the changes demanded by Indian secularism is to succeed with other religious communities.

(3) In India, too, leaders of atheistic secular humanism like Nehru have begun to see the need of some kind of spirituality to fill the vacuum created by secularization if the process is not to be reversed. Jawaharlal Nehru's evolution in this regard is significant, as is that of Jai Prakash and several others.

In the early days, Nehru envisaged without any regret the prospect of the destruction of the religions and religious cultures of India by the impact of secular technological culture from the West. Through the course of his life, however, he searched for an ethical and spiritual force to fill the vacuum created by secularization so as to humanize the technological culture. In his interview with Karanji in 1960 he said:

Yes. I have changed. The emphasis on an ethical and spiritual solution is not unconscious. It is deliberate, quite deliberate. There are good

reasons for it. First of all, apart from the material development that is imperative, I believe that the human mind is hungry for something deeper in terms of moral and spiritual development, without which all the material advance may not be worthwhile.

Evidently under Gandhi's influence and in the light of the growing dehumanization and threat to all life inherent in technological culture, the secular totalitarianism of Hitler and Stalin et al., Nehru's scientific secularism was opened to spiritual realities as a means of strengthening its humanism.

Though Nehru did not go farther than this, it points to the need to take seriously the renewal of the religious traditions of India to provide this spiritual humanizing force modernizing India. It is a call towards a new composite culture in which the religious cultures that contributed to the molding of a composite Indian culture in the past are redefined in their relevance to the humanization of the modern secular culture of science and technology. It is thus that the concept of open secularism can be strengthened in India. As Professor Leroy Rouner of Boston University puts it in an essay on "Civil Loyalty and New India":

The political paradox concerning religion in India is that precisely because religious ideas and values have been so much a part of India's problem, they will have to be part of India's solution. There is no empirical evidence that religion is waning as an influence in Indian political life. So a realistic political strategy must incorporate religious energy in the service of national goals, or watch it continue to corrode them.

The “Holy Materialism”: The Question of Bread in Christian and Marxist Perspective

by JAN MILIČ LOCHMAN

Jan Milič Lochman is professor of systematic theology at the University of Basel in Switzerland. His most recent book is The Lord's Prayer.

THE SLOGAN “holy materialism” was coined by Leonhard Ragaz and was in frequent use among Swiss and Czech religious socialists. The watchword has its polemical dimension. Its users protested against the “idealistic bias” of the main streams of traditional theologies, i.e., against the notorious tendency to interpret the themes of biblical faith under spiritualistic presuppositions as themes from the realm of “metaphysics and inwardness.” In its positive sense, the slogan tried to remind Christians of the wholistic nature of biblical thought, which encompasses “heaven and earth.” As Ragaz said: “Matter, too, is God’s creation. It is sanctified by him. It belongs to him. It must serve and glorify him.”¹

Such emphases express a clear social-ethical concern. They strengthen the longing for just social conditions, for such a solution of the bread-question that would be more faithful to the biblical imperative of righteousness. In this essay, special attention will be devoted to the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer² as a key-expression of the biblical “holy materialism.” How should we understand the bread-petition of Jesus? How does it contribute to our understanding of our human condition? In three steps I shall try to deal with these issues.

HUNGERING HUMAN BEING

Give us this day our daily bread: In the light of the petition, humanity is seen basically to be hungry, to be dependent constantly on bread, to be needy. The biblical view of humanity takes this elemental human condition very seriously. There is a holy materialism of the prophetic and apostolic message. Humanity’s material needs must never be underestimated. They have their rights and dignity on the basis of God’s good creation. Taken from the earth, we are earthly creatures. God has given us the earth and its

¹ Leonhard Ragaz, *Von der Revolution der Bibel*, I, *Das Unservater* (Zürich, 1942), p. 17.

² In the broader setting, I dealt with the fourth petition in my recent book: *The Lord's Prayer*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

material powers and resources. We depend on them. We need not be ashamed of this dependence. We need not keep quiet about it or repress it. We are body as well as soul, with all that this implies. We have impulses, needs, and material interests. To have no material needs is not in itself an ideal. In this regard the Bible parts company with many religions and philosophical trends in which asceticism plays a decisive role. Diogenes with his program of setting aside every need is no "saint," no model of Christian piety, even though he might have found many admirers and disciples in church history, especially in monastic circles. Asceticism as an end in itself is not a biblical way.

In the context of human life before God, however, the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer defines not only the worth of material needs but also their comparative worth. At this point we must allow for the opposing emphasis. More common perhaps than the first case is a second misunderstanding of material interests in human life: an overvaluing of them rather than an undervaluing. As things are, or, to put it theologically, under the *signs* of the Fall, human needs have a notorious tendency to grow, to grow to excess. There is also a perverted hunger that is oriented to accumulation and growth and that knows no bounds. There is hunger for power. Human drives, including the sex drive in distinction from this drive in other creatures, often go beyond what is in keeping with creation. In principle at least they become insatiable. Material interests take over the heart and become idols.

The petition sets clear limits to this temptation that bedazzles us. "Give us this day our daily bread": the two expressions, "daily" and "this day," point in this direction. They limit the question of bread even as they take it seriously both quantitatively and qualitatively. They put what is essential to life in the center: our daily bread today. They set the corresponding priorities. Those who pray this prayer must also set them. This means that we may not put anything we please under the protection and promise of the Lord's Prayer. In the history of exposition and in many sermons on the fourth petition one may detect a tendency in this direction, even in the best commentators. I recall the fine saying in Luther's Small Catechism in which he lists under "daily bread" not merely nourishment but houses, farms, fields, wives, families, health, and honor. I think that this is basically right, yet it opens the door to misunderstanding. It is as though we could set an extensive list of needs under the petition for bread and in this way justify them. The brief and sober wording of the petition—especially the "daily"

and "this day"—counsels restraint as regards this tendency toward free expansion.

Thus in praying the prayer we must show not only our freedom as regards material needs but also our readiness to test them critically, not to let them grow excessively, not to fall victim to them. Jesus was well aware of the latter temptation. We need only think of the parable of the rich farmer (Luke 12:16ff.). This man died because of his obsession with the question of bread. He died both in time and eternity. For, as Jesus said pointedly, "One does not live by bread alone" (Mt. 4:4). Criticism of needs and interests is required.

This criticism was always required, but it is urgently required today. For in distinction from past epochs in world history, we industrialized countries have reached a stage when elemental needs are for the first time met, or, as we might say more cautiously, can be met. We live in a society of superfluity. An unchecked thirst for ever more striking luxuries and their shameless display has recently put forth its artificially cultivated blossoms.

Has it brought with it a leap from the realm of necessity to that of freedom? At first sight it might seem so to an observer from past centuries. Much has been achieved compared to the elementary conditions of life that obtained for our ancestors. Yet most of us know better. In relation to our society we cannot speak of the realm of freedom in the full sense. Our realm of freedom is at the same time a realm of new compulsions. Many of these are linked to the excessive, artificially provoked, and manipulated needs of our consumer society. They do not make us freer or richer. At the cost of our true human and co-human needs, they make us poorer and more dependent.

The prayer for bread in the Lord's Prayer ought to make us rethink the situation. It should do so in the personal sphere by encouraging us freely to restrict our needs. In this sense, we must positively accept ascetic impulses. Let us not forget that in the Sermon on the Mount something is said about fasting (Matt. 6:16ff.). Naturally, asceticism will not be an end in itself; it will be a tool in the urgent clarifying of priorities. It will accomplish this in the area of thought by encouraging the church's theology to submit the ideologies and strategies of need in our consumer society to a critical test. It will accomplish it also in social ethics by working out the social dimension of the bread and emphasizing it. This brings us to our second heading in the present discussion.

BREAD AND JUSTICE

In our commentary thus far on the fourth petition we have not mentioned one little word that appears in two forms. It is the pronoun "us" and "our." We must not overlook it, for it draws our attention to a central point. We do not ask for ourselves alone but in a human community. The bread that we pray for is concretely and expressly our bread, but it is not ours alone. It is our common bread that we share with others. From the standpoint of God's kingdom, the question of justice—along with that of bread—is at the heart of the Lord's Prayer. The bread of the fourth petition is bread that must be shared.

It is noteworthy how often and emphatically in the Old Testament the motif of bread is linked to the command to share. Thus we read in Isa. 58:7: "Share your bread with the hungry." The psalmist, too, praises God as the one "who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry" (Ps. 146:7). The impressive references to the hungry and oppressed, and the emphatic word "justice," cannot be excluded from any theologically responsible discussion of the petition for bread, and certainly not in any circumstances today. For the nub of the problem is that there are hungry people in our world, masses of them. This is true at a time when, as noted, in vast areas of the world the question of bread is to a large extent detached from the context of physical hunger. In this situation of sharp contrast the words "right" and "justice" have a special force that must very deeply affect Christians who pray the Lord's Prayer. There is something very wrong about our handling of bread if near and far millions of hungry people are watching our mountains of bread and butter constantly growing.

Today, especially in so-called better circles, a new use has been found for the word "sin," which otherwise occurs only infrequently. After lavish meals people say: "I have sinned today." What they mean is that they have sinned against their waistlines. Against their better judgment they have put on too many pounds. But this word, which in these instances is uttered complacently, jokingly, and with patting of a well-filled stomach, might well take a serious and ominous turn. Extravagant consumption, not only of food but also of other basic raw materials, might become a real sin against our needy fellows and against God, and hence it might also become a judgment. Conversion is needed.

In these circumstances the prayer for bread becomes a word of conversion. "Bread for Brothers" is fittingly the title of an annual ecumenical Swiss

collection on behalf of the Third World. Here in fact, face to face with the need of bread in our modern world, Christian philanthropy, the demonstration of practical love of neighbor, is demanded. At the heart of our praying, and also, of course, of our readiness to give practical help, the work of relief must be taken up and supported. Even small steps count.

But the scope of the petition is broader. The issue is not just one of private renunciation and benevolence, though these are not to be disparaged as obligatory marks of conversion. Under the conditions of our one world, which is increasingly brought closer together in mutual involvement and dependence, we also have to question the systemic conditions under which hunger arises and the gap between rich and poor countries grows. The Religious Socialists already saw clearly that the Lord's Prayer must be applied in this area that seems to be dominated by forces that are hard to change. Leonhard Ragaz pointed out that in asking for daily bread "we ask for change in the modern social order, which rests on exploitation and profit. We ask for the overcoming of greed and fear, for fair pay for fair work, for the ending of unemployment, for the disappearance of alcoholism and prostitution, for the saving of nature from destruction by a technology that works in the service of false gods."³

For decades ecumenical thinking has been moving in this direction, first (in the forties and fifties) under the slogan "responsible society" (with a predominantly Western orientation), then, after 1966, as Christians from the Third World became increasingly involved, under the slogan "responsible world society." Today we discuss models of a new society, and ways to it, under the slogan "just, sustainable, and participatory society." Note the predicates. The economic order must be just but also sustainable (embracing the environment that is threatened with destruction). Above all, it must be oriented to participation and sharing. Is the ecumenical movement becoming involved in side issues in this regard? I think not, so long as it maintains a theological perspective, reflects and acts in a differentiated way, and avoids ideological shortcuts. The fourth petition encourages us to take steps in this direction. As a Latin American prayer puts it, "O God, to those who have hunger give bread; and to those who have bread the hunger for justice."⁴

GOD AND BREAD

To pray "Give us this day our daily bread" is to confess that God and bread belong inseparably together, whether the movement be from God to bread

³ Ragaz, *Das Unservater*, p. 19.

⁴ Quoted by Krister Stendahl, "Your Kingdom Come," *Cross Currents* 32/2 (1982): 263.

or from bread to God. Thus far we have been looking in the first direction. God comes into the question of bread and God's justice applies there. Let us now stress the other aspect. When we receive, we eat our bread before God. The fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer and the whole Bible, especially the Old Testament, teach us to value bread as a good gift of God. True, bread is also a product of human hands, the result of economic activity. For biblical faith, however, it is at the same time infinitely more; it is a proof of the goodness of the Creator.

From the standpoint of the Lord's Prayer, then, the question of bread is not just an economic matter. It is also a theological matter and primarily a doxological matter. In the Bible praise and thanksgiving constantly ring out for daily bread, for ours and for the food given to our fellows and to fellow creatures. The words of the psalmist are unforgettable: "The eyes of all look to thee, and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:15-16). A Jewish grace from the time of Jesus is to the same effect: "Praised be thou, O Lord our God, king of the world, who dost feed the whole world by thy goodness. In grace, love, and mercy he gives bread to all flesh . . . For he feeds and provides for all and shows his kindness to all and assigns food to all his creatures which he has made. Praised be thou, Lord, who dost feed all."⁵

In such texts, for which the New Testament has parallels in various contexts, two emphases stand out. First, they portray God as a generous Creator and extol God as a giver of bread. God grants food not just to those who have merited it but to all. We recall the saying of Jesus in Matthew 5:45 that the sun shines on the bad as well as the good and the rain refreshes all. Fundamentally, God's righteousness is not oriented to work or merit; it is rich in grace. This is worth noting, with all its ramifications. In a humanitarian society the question of bread cannot take the rigid form of a question of mere achievement. It is true that in everyday life in society we can hardly avoid evaluating achievement. We need the carrot and the stick if we are to focus our gifts and forces, to mobilize them and put them to use. But before God the mentality and society of achievement find their limits. They do so concretely in the matter of bread. Bread—that is, the elemental conditions of life—must be made available, so far as possible, to all. Various measures that are being taken in East and West to achieve this goal are steps in the right direction.

⁵ See P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum NT aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck'sche, 1928), 6:531.

The second emphasis is that if bread and God belong together, then for us bread and thanksgiving belong together. The texts already quoted are thanksgivings, graces. The people of the Bible, and devout people in all ages, realize that we cannot take bread for granted. This fact bitterly confronts them in experiences of want and hunger. From a vertical standpoint (i.e., in relation to God), bread ultimately comes from God. It is a sign and gift of God's grace. Recollection of the story of the manna offers an illustration. The first thing we ought to do when we take bread, even before eating, is to give thanks, to say grace.

We are probably tempted to dismiss this matter as nostalgic. But more is at stake than the fine habit of saying grace or table manners in general. (It should be noted that in our lands of overabundance there is vacillation between the two extremes of fast food, hasty eating with no social contact, and lavish display, meaningless and unworthy excess. Both fall short not merely *in terms* of human culture but also of the dignity of bread as the good gift of God.) From the standpoint of the spirit of prayer we must handle bread differently, namely with glad thankfulness and respect.

The Czech language has a fine term for bread which was earlier used as an equivalent for grace in popular speech: *boží dar*, God's gift, often in the diminutive with a suggestion of tenderness, *boží dáreček* (which is very hard to translate). Thus if a piece of bread fell from the table in peasants' houses, the custom was to lift it up very carefully and to kiss it reverently.

Now in saying this I am not calling for compulsory grace or for training in the kissing of bread. What I am asking for is reflection on the essential point that the inseparable relation between God and bread brings before us, namely, that we cannot take bread for granted, or, to put it positively, that we must learn to eat bread thankfully. We do not live by bread alone. This statement also means that the mere eating of bread alone, without gratitude and in detachment from God and neighbor, cannot be a means of blessing to us. We die by bread alone. This is a danger that threatens to destroy us both morally and socially in our society of overabundance, whether before God or our hungry fellows. To take things for granted in our dealings with bread, to have the lack of gratitude and respect that may be seen in our madness of consumption and waste—these things attack at the roots of a "just, sustainable, and participatory society." Here again we must say that conversion is needed. To pray "Give us this day our daily bread" is for us the beginning of revolt against this disorder in the world.

IN DIALOGUE WITH THE MARXISTS

The subtitle of this essay speaks of "The Question of Bread in Christian and Marxist Perspective." Until now I have not referred to the latter problematic. Still, it was present. Biblical interpretation was carried out in the presence of the Marxist challenge. Granted, biblical interpretation must primarily respect the biblical text and context, and occurs in connection with the church's history of interpretation. But beyond that, it stands in direct or indirect dialogue with the thought of the time.

The thought of the time—for me that was and is especially, though not exclusively, the thought of the Marxist. Now, Marxist ideology has suffered a crushing defeat in Eastern and Central Europe in the last few months. Above all, the foolish elevation of Marxist theory to the only permissible worldview of "Real Socialism" was revenged, in that the break-down of the totalitarian system was felt by most citizens to be a breakdown of Marxism itself. I palpably experienced this on the occasion of my recent engagement at the universities of Brno and Bratislava. I spoke in the auditoriums of both universities, which once displayed the proud inscription: "Marxism-Leninism—the science of all sciences and the art of all arts." This totalitarian claim has utterly foundered.

Has, thereby, for us theologians, the Marxist challenge been laid to rest? I would like to warn against such a conclusion. To answer totalitarian pseudo-claims with such a blanket statement would be a short-circuit hardly worthy of a free, above all theological, way of thinking. It is imperative to combine criticism with self-criticism. In this context—that of the question of bread—I would like to close this article with three short points which follow the three trains of thought developed above.

1. Marxism is to me important as a historical-material theory. In every age theology lives in dialogue with philosophy. For centuries theology had its choice: mostly in the direction of idealistic ways of thinking, such as Plato, Aristotle, or German Idealism. These are all respectable names and movements. Nevertheless, the successors of these traditions often underestimated the material world and the concerns of the flesh. Marxism, as historical-materialism, forces us to take seriously the material, above all economic questions, and thereby to rediscover something of biblical realism. The concrete *need of the hungry* should not be spiritually transfigured or softened. Thus: Holy Materialism. It is no accident that this slogan was preferred by religious socialists, i.e., *those* theologians who have engaged

themselves with Marx. Leonhard Ragaz rightly formulated: "From Christ to Marx—From Marx to Christ."⁶ He was correct in *both* parts of this book title.

2. Marxism reminds us of the prophetic truth that the question of bread as a material question is at the same time a social question, and therefore a question of *social justice*. In that regard the Marxist challenge enjoins us especially strongly to pay attention to the structural aspects of the problematic. "The human being—that is the world of human beings." "Human nature is the ensemble of social relationships." These classic formulations of the young Marx are one-sided. The human being is not *merely* that. Nevertheless, they address important aspects of the question of bread, i.e., the problematic of justice. This viewpoint concerns not only personal behavior, as important as it is in the life of faith, but also order, circumstances, conditions. These aspects have seldom received their due in the history of theology. Meaningful initiatives in the area of philanthropy, the alleviation of need, were often encouraged, but an analysis of the conditions and engagement to change them followed only seldom. Here Christians must make up for much neglect and could learn from Marxists.

3. There are, however, cases in which—from the Christian viewpoint—Marxist ideology and strategy come up short on the question of bread and are in need of supplementation. I am thinking especially of the question-complex *God and Bread*. Marxism tried to eliminate God, and wherever possible to shut faith out of public life in Marxist-dominated societies. Thereby, however, the essential *condition humaine* was distorted, the knowledge of the earthly accountability of the human being diminished. The question of justice was dogmatically reserved to a particular ideology and party, with alienating consequences in the interpersonal and also economic area. The question of bread cannot be solved if one understands the human being only as the "world of human beings" and the "ensemble of social relationships," and undervalues the personal worth of the individual, with his or her creative and destructive possibilities; or concretely, if one forgets that "one does not live by bread alone." It appears that today, in this age of *perestroika* and of drawing from the experience gained from the Christian-Marxist dialogue, critical Marxists are becoming open to this insight.

Here the meaning and contribution of the churches in Marxist society have become visible. The churches were for decades unwelcome. Yet, they remained and created in time, in spite of all enforced restrictions of their

⁶ Leonhard Ragaz, *Von Christus zu Marx-von Marx zu Christus* (Wernigerode, 1929).

possibilities, a modest, though highly significant *free space*. That free space was above all present where they tried without bitterness to render their special service out of the spirit of the gospel in the middle of the totalitarian temptations of their societies. They did this—with regard to the question of bread—through the steadfast prayer "Give us this day our daily bread," through practical engagement for a just solution to the question of bread, and through persistent witness that "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word which comes from the mouth of God (Mt. 4:4)." It is imperative to pay attention to all these three accents—in the East and in the West.

The Church Always Reforming

by JOHN W. DE GRUCHY

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IN 1981 THE Dutch Reformed Mission Church (*N.G. Sendingkerk*) in South Africa celebrated the centenary of its founding. In normal circumstances such an event would have been a joyous, uniting occasion. But that was not to be in this instance because many members and ministers of the *Sendingkerk* regarded its original inception as wrong and heretical, a testimony to the power of racism rather than the reconciling gospel of Jesus Christ. For them the centenary was an occasion for protest against the policy of the white Dutch Reformed Church which had resulted in the creation of apartheid churches of which theirs was the first.

A year later in 1982, at the Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, Canada, eleven South African delegates from the *N.G. Sendingkerk*, as well as Presbyterians and Congregationalists, refused to participate in the service of Holy Communion with which the Assembly began. The decision created considerable controversy because it seemed to go against the very meaning of the sacrament as a sign of Christian love, reconciliation, and unity. But it was precisely for this reason that the eleven refused. They believed it would be hypocritical to share in the Lord's Supper with members of the white Dutch Reformed Church who were present, on the grounds that the Dutch Reformed family of churches in South Africa was racially segregated. It was not appropriate to celebrate the sacrament of unity and fellowship in Canada when it was impossible to do so back home as one body in Christ. The church had become a "sign of disgrace," and therefore a "site of struggle" within the broader struggle for a non-racial and just South Africa.

The process of ecclesial segregation began at the synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape in 1829 when calls for segregation at Holy Communion were heard, but rejected as contrary to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions. Gradually, however, segregation became a common practice at the Lord's Table. This was opposed at several synods on the grounds of incompatibility with the teaching of Scripture, but by 1857 the Synod finally gave way to racial prejudice. The resolution which was

adopted did not retract the church's understanding of biblical teaching, but it allowed the dictates of white racism and missionary pragmatism to override Scripture:

The Synod considers it desirable and according to Holy Scripture that our heathen members be accepted and initiated into our congregations wherever it is possible; but where this measure, as a result of the weakness of some, would stand in the way of promoting the work of Christ among the heathen people, then congregations set up among the heathen, or still to be set up, should enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate building or institution.¹

By 1881 this allowance for exceptions had become the rule, and the *Sendingkerk* for people of mixed race ("coloured") was founded, the first of several racially-based Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa. This later provided the ecclesiological basis and theological justification for what was to be called "apartheid," and which, precisely for this reason, has been rejected as "nothing but a heresy."² Instead of the church and the sacraments being signs of God's liberating grace, they became a means of social and political dis-grace. Such dis-grace is by no means confined to the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, for much the same is true for other churches in the country and similar arguments for segregated churches were used in the United States and elsewhere. But wherever it is found it is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, as well as that of Calvin and the confessions of the Reformed tradition.

I. RESTORATION OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH

The Reformation proclamation of the gospel as justification by faith alone created ferment in the medieval church because it set people free from ecclesiastical tyranny and enabled them to live life on the basis of personal faith and responsibility. But this did not mean that the church or sacraments were no longer important for the Reformers. On the contrary, for Calvin the church was "the mother of all Christians,"³ for it was only through the church's faithful ministry of the Word and sacraments that the gospel could be heard, faith sustained, and, especially for the Genevan Reformer, that the

¹ See Chris Loff, "The History of a Heresy," in de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p. 19. Loff's essay outlines the historical development of the *N.G. Sendingkerk* in detail.

² See David Bosch, "Nothing but a Heresy," in de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, *op. cit.*, pp. 24f.

³ *Institutes*, IV/i/4.

world could be transformed to the glory of God. Calvin's concern was by no means that of replacing the Catholic church with an association of individuals drawn together by their evangelical piety. His concern was the reformation of *the* church so that it could fulfill its mission.

Calvin was a "second generation" reformer, building on and consolidating the work of others. Whereas Luther resisted far-reaching structural reforms, Calvin saw them as a fundamental necessity. Thus Francois Wendel concludes his study of Calvin by observing that the Genevan Reformer has left the imprint of his personality on history not through the formulation of any new doctrine but because "he was the founder of a powerfully organized Church and at the same time the author of a body of doctrine which was able to rally round it an intellectual elite as well as the mass of the faithful."⁴ Wendel is correct, but two qualifications are necessary.

The first is that while Calvin's legacy was a carefully balanced account of Reformed doctrine and ecclesiology, it was really his successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza, along with John Knox in Scotland and the Puritans in England, who consolidated Calvinism into an ecclesiastical and political force. Calvin, for example, was "not a doctrinaire Presbyterian";⁵ it was Beza who claimed that form of church government as the only biblical form, and made discipline a mark of the true church.

The second qualification is that while Calvin eventually sought to turn Protestantism into a unitive force, he originally had no intention of starting a new church or founding a new tradition. He saw himself as part of a reform movement within the catholic church and regarded his primary task as rescuing it from the "tyranny of tradition" which destroyed its catholicity and prevented it from hearing the liberating Word of the gospel. Indeed, Calvin categorically rejects the possibility that there can "be two or three churches unless Christ be torn asunder—which cannot happen!"⁶ From beginning to end Calvin confesses one, holy, and catholic church. As Troeltsch observes, it was only "the resistance of German Lutheranism, and the independence of Anglicanism, which forced Calvinism to become an independent Protestant Church."⁷

The Reformers discovered, of course, that you could not restore the ancient church in the sixteenth century as it was in the first centuries anymore

⁴ Francois Wendel, *Calvin* (London: Collins, 1965), p. 360.

⁵ Basil Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," *Courtenay Studies in Reformation Thought*, Vol. 1: *John Calvin* (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966), p. 26.

⁶ *Institutes*, IV/i/2.

⁷ Ernest Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 2 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), p. 579.

than you can in the twentieth, for history has moved on. What is possible and what was imperative for them is that the church be reformed and renewed through Word and Spirit in correspondence with the ancient church and the reality of a new historical context. But this is not founding a new church, and that was never the intention of the Reformers. Their struggle was always a struggle to renew the old church, to restore its worship and its structure, to rediscover the true preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments as its focus and form. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566), for example, clearly sets out to show that the Reformed believers are in unity with the old true church, and not, therefore, sectarian or heterodox.⁸ In other words, the Reformers saw their task as enabling the church to get back on track in its task of bearing witness to God's saving and sanctifying purposes for the world.

Calvin would have been horrified by the many schisms that have taken place within the Reformed movement, and would have found denominationalism incomprehensible. He would have been even more horrified by the fact that many divisions and schisms have been for personal, social, and political reasons contrary to the gospel. This largely explains why Calvin was harsher in his attitudes towards the Anabaptists and others, like Michael Servetus, whom he regarded as heretics and schismatics, than he was towards Rome. Georgia Harkness is correct in her assessment that "in Calvin's eyes apostasy was worse than papistry; the virus of Protestant heresy a more deadly poison than that of Roman error."⁹

In the same passage in which he speaks of the "tyranny of human tradition" Calvin makes it very clear: "For we do not scorn the church (as our adversaries, to heap spite upon us, unjustly and falsely assert); but we give the church the praise of obedience, than which it knows no greater."¹⁰ And in his debate with Cardinal Sadoletto he claims:

all that we have attempted has been to renew that ancient form of the Church, which, at first was sullied and distorted by illiterate men of indifferent character, and was afterward flatigiously mangled and almost destroyed by the Roman pontiff and his faction.¹¹

Several years later, in 1543, in his address to Emperor Charles V in which

⁸ Second Helvetic Confession, for example, chapters 13 and 17.

⁹ Georgia Harkness, *John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), p. 97.

¹⁰ *Institutes*, IV/x/18.

¹¹ John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed. by John C. Olin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 62.

Calvin set out at length and with great style his rationale for "The Necessity of Reforming the Church," Calvin reiterates a constant theme that the Reformers "had no other end in view than to ameliorate in some degree the miserable condition of the Church."¹² Moreover, he goes on to speak of the Reformers as those who have "done no small service to the Church in stirring up the world as from the deep darkness of ignorance to read the Scriptures . . ." Clearly, even at this stage where the break with Rome was complete and his work at Geneva in full swing, he understood his work as reforming the Church, not creating a new one. With reference to auricular confession, but with wider significance, Calvin concludes, "we have no controversy in this matter with the ancient Church; we only wish, as we ought, to loose a modern tyranny of recent date from the necks of believers."¹³

Luther had perceived early on that the Reformation was a struggle between the true and false church, between the church which sought to be faithful to the gospel and the church which was in bondage to the law of human tradition epitomized by the papacy. Calvin inherited this view, and his work as a reformer confirmed the fact that the Reformation of the church was a continuous struggle—not only against the papacy, but also against radical schismatics and civil authorities. For Calvin, as for contemporary liberation theologians, the church was and is a "site of struggle" against tyranny, and any attempt to reform it inevitably meant conflict within it.

The focus of Calvin's attack was the triumphalist and absolutist claim of Rome, the claim to be the kingdom of God on earth with control of the keys to the kingdom of God in heaven. This, as we have seen, lay at the heart of Calvin's critique of the idolatry of Rome. Over against these claims, Calvin insisted that the Kingdom of God is God's reign in Christ over the church, and that therefore the church is called to be obedient to the Word of God. Furthermore, the true church is known only to God, it is the church of God's elect, and therefore no one can control or manipulate it. On the contrary, its unity lies not in allegiance to Rome but is a gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ. McDonnell puts Calvin's position in a nutshell: "The lordship of Christ is effective in her only on condition of her unconditional poverty. The lordship of Christ stands over against all human presumptions, all self-redemption, all ritual exhibitionism, and all ecclesiasticism."¹⁴

¹² *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. by J.K.S. Reid (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1978), p. 186.

¹³ Calvin, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

¹⁴ Kilian McDonnell, *John Calvin, The Church and the Eucharist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 172.

The undeniable fact that Calvin and the other Reformers were no longer within the Roman church was attributed by Calvin, on the one hand, to their having been "expelled with anathemas and curses,"¹⁵ and, on the other, to the necessary act of separating themselves from falsehood.¹⁶ But as Calvin understood this, it was not separation from the Catholic church, but from the papal control of the church in order that Christ alone should reign. Calvin, unlike Luther, was even reticent to speak of the "false church" precisely because there was only one church. The struggle was rather within the one church between truth and falsehood.¹⁷ It was not that there were no true Christians within the Roman Catholic Church, for even there the Word of God could be rightly proclaimed, heard, and obeyed.¹⁸ But the papacy, curia, and their supportive theologians, had placed the church in bondage to their unbiblical teaching, teaching which was also at variance with the ancient traditions of the Catholic church itself. Hence, according to Calvin, the unity of the universal church is preserved not by allegiance to Rome but by allegiance to the Word of Christ.¹⁹

Calvin and his descendents pursued the task of reforming the church according to the Word of God with considerable vigor and thoroughness. "Reformed teaching," writes Jaroslav Pelikan, "put at the head of its agenda the task of carrying 'reform in accordance with the Word of God' to its necessary consequences, with a consistency and a rigor that went considerably beyond Luther."²⁰ But it did not go as far as the Anabaptists; indeed, as we have already intimated, Calvin's criticism of Rome is often far less harsh than his rejection of the more radical Reformers of his day. The reason for this was largely Calvin's own commitment to Christendom, that is, to the Christianization of civilization and the maintenance of its unity, a concern which Catholics and Calvinists shared alike. Unlike Luther, for Calvin the church was far more than an instrument of salvation; it was a means of grace for the sanctification of society and every dimension of life within it.²¹

II. REFORM WITHIN CHRISTENDOM

In seeking to reform the Catholic church, then, Calvin did not see any need to break with Constantinian Christendom. His appeal to the fathers of

¹⁵ *Institutes*, IV/ii/6.

¹⁶ *Institutes*, IV/ii/10.

¹⁷ Ganoczy, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

¹⁸ *Institutes*, IV/ii/12.

¹⁹ *Institutes*, IV/i/9.

²⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition vol. 4: Reformation of Church and Dogma* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 186.

²¹ See Troeltsch, *op. cit.*, p. 591.

the first three centuries, that is, prior to the Constantinian settlement, and his critique of the temporal claims of the Roman see which derived from that settlement, did not lead him to reject Constantinianism or connect it with the tyranny he so strongly opposed. On the contrary, Calvin was, in George Williams' terminology, a "magisterial reformer."²² He did not hesitate to use the instruments of the state to further the interests of the church. In other words, Calvin not only refused to follow the Anabaptists' rejection of Christendom, but he used the established position of the church to persecute its more radical reformers even while he attempted to restore the church to its pre-Constantinian glory. This clinging to the prerogatives of Christendom lay behind Calvinist imperialism, and remains a source of tension and contradiction in Reformed as well as Catholic ecclesiology even today. This is particularly true in contexts like Latin America and South Africa where Constantinianism has been cultivated by the state in the service of its own legitimation, and where the church has co-operated in the process.

One of the legacies of Constantinianism endemic to the medieval church was, in Segundo's words, "that new members no longer entered Christianity through personal conversion but rather through the simple process of birth."²³ This meant that the growth of the church became vegetative rather than transformative, a church of the unevangelized. This is a phenomenon which, as Segundo notes, had disastrous consequences in Latin America as well as in many other places where Christianity has been the established religion by law, custom, or dominance. Segundo's comment reveals, however, the very dilemma in which the Reformed tradition has found itself ever since Calvin struggled to maintain the tension between a church of committed members and a church established in society, viz., a church seeking to be faithful to Scripture, yet trapped by the prejudices and weaknesses of its members, their cultural norms, and the protective cocoon of Christendom.

An illustration of this struggle on two fronts, the one Roman and the other Anabaptist,²⁴ is seen in Calvin's somewhat laborious and torturous defense of infant baptism.²⁵ What is of interest to us here is not whether infant baptism can be defended, or Calvin's lapse from exegetical integrity, but the motivation for his argument. His defense of infant baptism is an

²² George Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), p. xxiv.

²³ Juan Luis Segundo, *The Community Called Church* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980),

p. 45.

²⁴ See Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981),

p. 45.

²⁵ *Institutes*, IV/xv-xvi.

affirmation of continuity with the catholic church, an affirmation of the church as a covenant community in which grace precedes individual faith, and an insistence on the need for the church to remain an institution at the center of the public arena in order to Christianize it. Calvin was well acquainted with Anabaptist thought and practice, but because he desperately wanted to distance himself and the Reformation from Anabaptist radicalism he tended to react very strongly and negatively. For Calvin as for Luther, Anabaptist meant social revolution.²⁶ But he was also fearful of its sectarianism, and scornful of its claims to be "pure and undefiled," even though he himself believed that the church should endeavour to be holy and blameless.²⁷

Calvin was seeking to resolve one of the crucial problems left unresolved by medieval ecclesiology and later Christian humanism, and one which remains with us. The corruption of the late medieval church was such that many who ardently desired reformation fell back upon Augustine's teaching on the "invisible church." Augustine clearly did not deny the importance of the visible church, its structure and witness in the world. But he recognized that the visible church included many nominal members and had many blemishes. It was not the pure "bride of Christ" it was meant to be, nor was it possible, as the Donatists argued, for it to be pure in this world. But this was no excuse for not striving after holiness; it was not an excuse for the visible church to be a sign of dis-grace rather than a means of grace.

The way in which Calvin sought to resolve the tension between the purity of the church and the inevitability of nominal membership was, theologically, through the doctrine of election and, practically, through the preaching of the Word and the exercising of discipline. Both of these became central tenets of Calvinist faith and practice, and were fundamental to the legalistic ethos which emerged within the Reformed tradition.²⁸ Yet despite the need to create a disciplined church, Calvin argued that the true church is known only to God, that it even existed within the corrupt Roman church, and that while every effort must be made for the church to be pure, the Anabaptists were wrong in believing that such a state could be achieved in this world. Thus Calvin rejected any absolutist claims by the church to be the only true church on the grounds of its historic structures and hierarchy, or because of its sectarian exclusiveness. There was a qualitative distinction between Christ the head and Lord of the church, and the empirical church; the kingdom of God and church were not coterminous. The true church,

²⁶ Balke, *op. cit.*, p. 41, 43, 48.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50f.

²⁸ See Troeltsch, *op. cit.*, p. 59off.

the elect, were ultimately known to God alone. Thus the doctrine of election, rather than providing a basis for what became "imperial Calvinism," was protection from absolutist claims and triumphalist pretensions. It was central to Calvin's ideological critique of what he perceived to be the idolatrous claims of Rome.

What Calvin sought to avoid, however, was not only the absolutizing of the church, but also the development of a doctrine of "two churches," the one "invisible," the other "visible."²⁹ The church, Calvin wrote in the first edition of his *Institutes*, "can exist without any visible appearance . . ."³⁰ Yet for him the "invisible" church was not an alternative church, but a critical means to challenge and reform the "visible" church. There is, in fact, "only one church which is distinguished from the spurious church by the fact that it exists to serve Jesus Christ."³¹ In Niesel's words, Calvin "does not intend his description 'visible' church to be taken as a cloak behind which human weakness and sin, and the deliberate disavowal of the Lordship of Christ, may undisturbedly work themselves out."³² Hence Calvin's "humble exhortation" to Emperor Charles V on "The Necessity of Reforming the Church" was written, as Calvin put it, on behalf "of all those who wish Christ to reign." Indeed, for Calvin, as McDonnell perceptively notes, "where the lordship of Christ is actualized there is the church."³³ This was the basis for the later development of the Free Church tradition in England for which the "crown rights of the Redeemer" required the disestablishment of the church from the control of the state. There we find, as P. T. Forsyth so rightly discerned, a creative blending of Calvinism and Anabaptism, a blending of the "gathered church" of believers and the "public church" engaged in its mission to the nation.³⁴ This relates well to the ecclesiology which has emerged amongst Latin American Catholic liberation theologians for whom the church is essentially a minority community of committed disciples, yet not one which withdraws from the world, but rather one which is engaged in a universal mission to "fashion human history" according to the gospel.³⁵

²⁹ The term "invisible church" (*ecclesia invisibilis*) occurs only once in the final edition of the *Institutes* IV/i/7. See Wilhelm Neuser, "Calvin's Teaching on the *notae fidelium*: An Unnoticed Part of the *Institutio* 4.1.8," in Elsie Anne McKee and Brian Armstrong, eds., *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p. 83.

³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, first ed., 1536, p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

³² Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 191.

³³ McDonnell, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

³⁴ P. T. Forsyth, *Faith, Freedom and the Future* (London: Independent Press, 1955).

³⁵ Segundo, *The Community Called Church*, p. 79.

Protestantism has often been criticized as a religion of individualism. That it should have become so would have been inconceivable to John Calvin, but it is nonetheless a critique which has good foundation.³⁶ The origin of Protestant individualism is complex both theologically and sociologically. Theologically it is rooted in pre-Reformation piety, in Luther's emphasis on personal faith and conversion, the priesthood of all believers, and the right of each person to interpret Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Within Calvinism more specifically, the way in which the doctrine of election was interpreted tended to reinforce such individualism. The real church was the invisible church known only to God, those individuals whom God had called and chosen from the foundation of the world.

Sociologically, Protestant individualism is related to the collapse of feudalism, the rise of capitalist trade, and the growth of towns during the period in which the Reformation occurred. An ideological link between Luther's personalism and the emergence of a Protestant bourgeoisie was the individualism which emanated from the Enlightenment with its stress on human rights and freedoms. In other words, the break with Constantinian Christendom which began to occur in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, and especially after the French Revolution, gradually, in Leonardo Boff's words, tied Protestantism "to the historic liberal subject."³⁷ Thus despite the fact that "the communal character of human existence is found in all" Calvin's writings³⁸ ("Humanity was formed to be a social animal," Calvin writes in his commentary on Genesis 2:18³⁹), the Reformed tradition has been strongly influenced by the individualism that has pervaded European society since the Enlightenment, and which has radically affected its ethos. This has been especially true of the Reformed tradition within the Swiss, Anglo-Saxon, and Dutch worlds, where theology, sociology, and politics combined to shape a character of personal initiative and responsibility, human rights and democratic freedoms, and the liberty of conscience. The importance of this for the liberation of the Reformed tradition must not be underestimated, but it must also be recognized that it was not without its cost.

Just as the Reformed tradition in the modern period has been tied to the

³⁶ See Troeltsch, *op. cit.*, p. 587.

³⁷ Leonardo Boff, "Luther, the Reformation, and Liberation," in Dow Kirkpatrick, ed., *Faith Born in the Struggle for Life: A Rereading of Protestant Faith in Latin America Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 200.

³⁸ See John Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), p. 166.

³⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. by John King, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 128.

liberal subject, so by extension it has also been tied to liberal political programs of reform rather than the restructuring of society on a collective or communal basis. This can be seen, for example, in the way in which many churches in the Reformed family in the West, and English-speaking churches such as the Presbyterians and Congregationalists in South Africa, have been in the forefront of liberal causes, but have been far more reserved in their support for radical social change. By way of contrast, Afrikaner Calvinism, in its legitimation of apartheid, rejected liberal reformism and supported the radical restructuring of society on a collective basis, but one which was founded on cultural, ethnic, and national identity. Aligned to this has been an understanding of the church which, in its visible manifestation, is defined and structured by Afrikaner Calvinism according to race and nationality rather than individual piety.

Reformed ecclesiology has not escaped, then, from falling prey to rampant individualism and the pietism which goes with it, or ecclesiastical triumphalism and its attendant legalism, at various moments in its history. Yet its two-fold character, its attempt to combine "the ideals of a free church with those of an establishment," which had rendered it "at once so prone to divide," has also enabled it to make a significant contribution to the rediscovery of the ecumenical church in our time.⁴⁰ It was this understanding of the church, for example, which was to play such a vital role in the shaping of church and state relations in the United States of America, and which has kept alive the notion that the "separation of church and State" does not lessen the public responsibility of the church, but rather makes it even more needed, though in ways which are no longer Constantinian.

What is often forgotten, however, and yet what is crucial in Reformed ecclesiology for determining the freedom of the church to be the church, is not its formal relationship to the state, but its freedom to confess Jesus Christ as Lord over all realms of life, not least its own.⁴¹ This implied that the church could never settle down on the assumption that its institutional form guarantees faithfulness. That was the Roman heresy, and it inevitably leads to triumphalism, whether Catholic or Reformed. For Calvin the church under the Word and Spirit only existed in the process of reformation, hence the slogan *ecclesia semper reformanda*, the church is only the church when it

⁴⁰ G.S.M. Walker, "Calvin and the Church," in Donald K. McKim, *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), p. 223.

⁴¹ See de Gruchy, "The Freedom of the Church and the Liberation of Society: Bonhoeffer on the Free Church, and the 'Confessing Church' in South Africa," in H. van Hoogstraaten, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics: Old Europe and New Frontiers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

is reforming according to its confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. Its structure is determined by its confession.

III. THE CONFESSING STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

The problem which this presented for the Reformed tradition was that of ecclesial continuity. For the Roman Catholic Church continuity was guaranteed by the doctrine of apostolic succession, the cornerstone of the institution. The Spirit had been given to the church and Christ reigned through those appointed to the episcopate. For the Reformers the Spirit had likewise been given to the church and Christ reigned, but through the Word. Continuity thus became dependent upon divine grace and confessional faithfulness in fulfilling its task in the world. In the case of Luther this was more than sufficient, and therefore the inherited church structures could be maintained though under new evangelical management. For Calvin, however, the maintenance of evangelical faith required a church order consonant with Scriptural teaching, and therefore an order which enabled the true and faithful ministry of the Word and Sacraments, as well as the exercise of a godly discipline. The church for the Reformers was thus not hierarchically structured, for all its members were priests; it was structured functionally according to the charisms of the Spirit, and especially the gift of preaching and teaching, in order that this priesthood might flourish and fulfill its role both in the church and the world.

Calvin's decisive break with Roman ecclesiasticism and the stress on the need for the church to be always reforming did not mean, however, a lack of church order. Indeed, church order became an essential element within the Reformed tradition, sometimes to an exaggerated and unevangelical degree. But this concern for church order was based on the conviction that even though the true church could not be equated with its visible structure, its visible structure was part of its witness. The marks of the true church are visible.⁴²

What Calvin saw so clearly was not only that individual Christians should be converted by the preaching of the gospel and bear witness to Christ, but that the *church* itself needed to be reformed on an evangelical basis and become a witness to the gospel. He saw, like any good catholic ecclesialogist, that if the church was to be the mother of believers, nurturing them in the grace of Christ, and a sign of God's kingdom in the world, then it could not be relegated to an invisible role. It had to be structurally trans-

⁴² See Neuser, *op. cit.*

formed so that it could truly fulfill its divinely-given function. If Calvin had had recourse to sociological theory, he would have argued that "the structure of the church has an effect on the consciousness of its members."⁴³

Calvin allowed for disagreement on matters of secondary importance or *adiaphora*, that is, matters of indifference, and he affirmed the right of individual conscience in this regard.⁴⁴ But the true church lived by proclaiming the gospel and thus confessing Christ "according to the Scriptures." Anything which undermined this witness was to be opposed. Thus once the church had been restructured according to the Word of God, Calvin expressed reluctance about further change, and on his deathbed he even charged the Genevan pastors to resist change as dangerous and harmful.⁴⁵ Yet he accepted the fact that restructuring the church according to the Word of God could lead to different forms of church government, including episcopacy, as long as they enabled the true preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments.

Calvin was flexible within limits. This has not prevented churches within the Reformed tradition from an ecclesiasticism which has given some kind of absolute status to particular forms of government, as though the Spirit was bound to Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, or Episcopalianism. But such ecclesiastical fundamentalism, like confessionalism, must be rejected as contrary to the liberating message of the gospel, to say nothing about Calvin's own protest against Rome.

The Reformed concern to ensure that everything is done "decently and in order," a commendable virtue, can become a damnable vice when it prevents the kind of transformation which the gospel required at the time of the Reformation and requires in our own time. In South Africa it has often been the case that Reformed church order and ecclesiastical legalism has prevented the Dutch Reformed and other Reformed churches from being able to move responsibly against injustice, and, by the same token, has managed to still the voice of its prophets. One such prophet was Beyers Naudé, a former Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Transvaal.

Naudé's career as a "prophet without honor" in his own Afrikaner community was launched after the Sharpeville massacre of black protesters in 1960.⁴⁶ Sharpeville led to the convening of the Cottesloe Consultation of

⁴³ Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 249.

⁴⁴ *Institutes*, III/xix/7; IV/i/12.

⁴⁵ See Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 213; B. J. Kidd, *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 650.

⁴⁶ See Peter Randall, ed., *Not Without Honour: Tribute to Beyers Naudé* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1981).

South African member churches of the World Council of Churches, a grouping which at that time included the Cape and Transvaal Synods of the Dutch Reformed Church, as well as the smaller, more politically conservative *Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk*. Although the Dutch Reformed participants at Cottesloe agreed to the decisions adopted at Cottesloe, which gave support to a process of racial reform, the Synods, under the powerful pressure of Prime Minister Verwoerd, rejected them and forced its participants to toe the line. Naudé refused and in 1963 founded the Christian Institute, the first attempt at creating an ecumenical confessing church in South Africa in relation to apartheid, and thus laid the foundation for many of the confessing and prophetic initiatives which were taken by Christians since then.⁴⁷

In the process, however, Naudé was, step by synodical step, excluded from the ministry of his own church, and, in 1977, together with the Christian Institute, was banned and Naudé silenced for seven years by the state. It is not for nothing that Douglas Bax rhetorically asked, when the Christian Institute was initially condemned by the church: "Has the Dutch Reformed Church become Roman Catholic?"⁴⁸ Ironically, the Catholic Archbishop of Durban, Denis Hurley, was later to praise Naudé as a "Calvinist and Catholic," likening Naudé to Catholic liberation theologians in Latin America, and using catholic in its broader and more inclusive sense.⁴⁹ A further sign of Naudé's stature and commitment to the cause of justice and liberation was his inclusion in the African National Congress' delegation to their historic talks with the South African government in May 1990.

While aspects of church order may be, as Calvin maintained, matters of indifference, it is not an indifferent matter for the church always to be reforming according to the Word of God as this is heard, obeyed, and confessed in new historical contexts. As Karl Barth stressed,⁵⁰ this does not mean an indefinite or haphazard form of community, a continual tinkering with structures, or a restless introduction of novelty, but a form which "arises from a hearing of the voice of Jesus Christ." It is neither enslavement to church law nor lawlessness, but "confessing" law, law derived from obe-

⁴⁷ See John W. de Gruchy, "A Short History of the Christian Institute" in Charles Villavicencio and John W. de Gruchy, eds., *Resistance and Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), pp. 14ff.

⁴⁸ Douglas Bax, "Has the Dutch Reformed Church Become Roman Catholic?," *Pro Veritate*, vol. 5, no. 6, October 1966.

⁴⁹ Denis Hurley, "Beyers Naudé—Calvinist and Catholic," in Randall, *op. cit.*, pp. 70f.

⁵⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, p. 676.

dience to Christ.⁵¹ Therefore the church is always "ready for fresh obedience and prepared for the discovery and establishment of a new order on the basis of new and better instruction."⁵² In this, as in other respects, the essence of Reformed ecclesiology is faithfulness to the gospel, for this not only determines its structure, but also enables it to be the community of Christ in the world, truly united in its faith and praxis. Thus the ecclesiological watchword *ecclesia semper reformanda*

does not mean always going with the time, to let the current spirit of the age be the judge of what is true and false, but in every age, and in every controversy with the spirit of the age, to ask concerning the form and doctrine and order and ministry which is in accordance with the unalterable essence of the Church . . . It means never to grow tired of returning not to the origin in time but to the origin in substance of the community. The Church is catholic when it is engaged in this *semper reformari*, so that catholicism has nothing to do with conservatism either . . .⁵³

The characteristic order of elders or presbyters, deacons, and, for Calvin, doctors of theology, which in varying combinations found embodiment in Reformed, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches, has been regarded by the tradition as being faithful to Scripture and to the substance of the gospel. Elders govern the church, deacons serve the community, and doctors of theology provide teaching and instruction in the Word of God.

Of particular significance was Calvin's restoration and redesigning of the diaconate, for it not only demonstrates how a fresh understanding of the gospel led to a change in church order, but in the process the diaconate was rescued from being a stepping-stone to priestly orders and became the means whereby the church related its liturgical life, the service of Word and Sacrament, to its service of the needs of the world. By making the diaconate an essential part of the life of the church, and not just a steppingstone to ordination or a stopgap until the secular authorities took over such responsibilities, Calvin ensured that the service of the world remained a central focus of the life and worship of church. This has led Elsie McKee to comment that "the Calvinist Reformed understanding of the church's diaconal ministry seems to offer one of the best patterns for relating corporate ethics

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 682.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 717.

⁵³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, p. 705.

to corporate worship in the religiously plural global village of the modern world."⁵⁴

For the Reformed tradition, then, the faith confessed and ecclesiology are inseparable; the message of the church cannot be separated from its order. Indeed, its structured existence in the world is an integral part of its message. A church which is divided by race or gender or class, a church which is captive to political ideologies, or a church which is in bondage to a particular culture, irrespective of the purity of its message or confession, is in danger of becoming a false church. For while the Reformed churches no less than others become captive to culture, it is fundamental to the tradition that the structure of the church, its existence in the world, must reflect the gospel. "There is no area of the church," wrote Bonhoeffer, "which is not wholly and exclusively subject to Christ."⁵⁵ The being of the church is part of its mission, or, to put it differently, its existence is hermeneutical, it interprets the gospel in the world.

Thus the Barmen Declaration of the Confessing Church in the German Third Reich not only rejected the ideology of Nazism but in its third article also rejected a church order which denied the sole Lordship of Jesus Christ, the "One Word of God." It refused to be restructured on principles alien to evangelical faith because through its order it testified to Jesus Christ.

The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and sacraments through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.⁵⁶

It went on to say: "We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions." It is precisely for this reason, too, that many Christians engaged in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa have begun to see the connection between that struggle and the unity of the church. For while it always remains true that the unity of the church is given to it in Jesus Christ, the way in which

⁵⁴ Elsie Anne McKee, *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 46; see also William Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1983), pp. 103ff.

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom* (London: Collins, 1966), p. 178.

⁵⁶ The Barmen Declaration, article 3.

unity is appropriated and expressed in the life and structure of the church is related to the faithfulness of its witness and confession.

IV. CHURCH ORDER AND ETHICAL HERESY

In 1925, in an address given to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches meeting in Cardiff, Wales, Karl Barth addressed the question of "The Desirability and Possibility of a Universal Reformed Creed." For Barth, such a creed was neither desirable nor possible for several reasons, one of which was that there was no consensus on the concrete situation which was forcing the church to confess its faith anew. "The Church must have something to say, some pronouncement to make which concerns the concrete life of men." Almost as though he were contradicting himself, Barth then went on to speak of one such concrete situation by way of illustration. "The Church must have the courage to speak today (I mention only one specific problem) upon the fascist, racialist *nationalism* which since the war is appearing in similar forms in all countries."⁵⁷ But Barth doubted whether the church really wanted to say anything on such burning and dangerous questions. If it did not want to address them while they were still hot, then it was preferable not to say anything at all.

The situation changed dramatically within a few years with the advent of Nazism and the Third Reich. In discussion by correspondence with Dietrich Bonhoeffer in September 1933, Barth and his younger colleague came to the conclusion that a *status confessionis* had arrived, the first since the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century.⁵⁸ By this they meant that a situation had arisen within the German Evangelical Church which demanded that the church confess its faith anew against an ideology which was subverting the gospel and its proclamation. Suddenly matters which under other circumstances might have been indifferent or of secondary importance in the life of the church, such as its form and structure in the world, became issues which were fundamental to its life and witness. The church was forced to take a stand for the truth if it wanted to remain the church of Jesus Christ. Its unity became contingent upon its confession. Hence the importance of the Barmen Declaration and the decisions made at the Dahlem Synod about church order.⁵⁹ The confessing of Christ had re-drawn the boundaries of the church, separating the true church from the

⁵⁷ Karl Barth, *Theology and Church* (London: SCM, 1962), pp. 132f.

⁵⁸ See the correspondence in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords* (London: Collins, 1965), pp. 226f.

⁵⁹ See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, p. 175; Bonhoeffer, "The Question of the Boundaries of the Church and Church Union," in *The Way to Freedom* (London: Collins, 1966), p. 87.

false within the German Evangelical Church itself.⁶⁰ No longer was it a conflict between the Reformation churches and Rome, but a struggle for the very life of the Evangelical church.

Since World War II many different attempts have been made by churches within the Reformed tradition to restate and confess their faith anew. There has also been considerable ecumenical discussion in recent years as to whether or not the church is faced with a *status confessionis* in a variety of contexts.⁶¹ Barth himself believed that the possibility of nuclear war created a new *status confessionis*. This was not a self-evident doctrinal matter, at least traditionally conceived, but it was one which affected the very life and destiny of the world as a whole. But that, for Barth, was precisely at the heart of a *status confessionis*; it was a moment in which the crisis facing society impinged directly upon the life and testimony of the church. As Barth told the World Alliance in Cardiff in 1925, the "old Reformed Creed" was "wholly ethical," and was always addressed to the public sphere. This was especially true of Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zürich, and author of the Second Helvetic Confession in 1566. Bullinger stressed not only the importance of doctrine and ministry for the continuity of the church, but faithfulness in its life and witness to the gospel.⁶² Thus when Visser 't Hooft, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, spoke about "ethical heresy" at the 1967 Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala, he was standing firmly in line with early Reformed tradition.⁶³

Yet it was only with the Presbyterian Confession of 1967 in the United States, as Edward Dowey points out, that "a strong social-ethical hermeneutic of faithful obedience is introduced into a Reformed confessional document."⁶⁴ This was not true of the Barmen Declaration, for though it addressed the heresy of Nazi ideology it did not deal concretely and specifically with anti-semitism and other evils in society. The Confession of 1967 is strikingly different. Reflecting the burning, critical issues of its time and in many respects ours, we now find within a Reformed Confession reference to the fact that God's revelation in Jesus Christ requires that the church must work for the abolition of racial discrimination, engage in the struggle

⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom*, p. 79.

⁶¹ Eugene TeSelle, "How Do We Recognize a *Status Confessionis*?" *Theology Today*, vol. xlv, no. 1, April 1988, pp. 71f.

⁶² A. C. Cochrane, "The Mystery of the Continuity of the Church," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1965, pp. 83f.

⁶³ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, "The Mandate of the Ecumenical Movement," in *The Uppsala 68 Report* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), appendix 5.

⁶⁴ Dowey, *Ibid.*, p. 94.

for justice and peace in society, work to end poverty, and promote a genuinely Christian understanding of human sexuality.⁶⁵

Alongside this strong socio-ethical dimension, there is also another very important innovation. Instead of anathemas against others, there is a confession of guilt regarding the church's own failure in the past, indeed, complicity in the very sins which the gospel calls it to oppose. Without pronouncing any anathemas as such, the Confession of 1967 makes it clear that faithfulness to the ethical demands of the gospel belongs to the marks of a true church while disobedience characterizes a false church. While the Confession of 1967 today is in some respects already dated, and while its treatment of reconciliation may reflect what the Kairos Document calls "church theology," its intention is clearly prophetic and liberating. In fact, while it predates liberation theology, it already anticipates something of its challenge.⁶⁶

Of particular significance for our discussion is the declaration that a *status confessionis* existed in South Africa made by the Lutheran World Federation meeting in Dar-es-Salaam in 1977. And then, of great importance for the Reformed tradition, came the Ottawa meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982. In the words of Allan Boesak, the WARC recognized "that apartheid is a heresy, contrary to the Gospel and inconsistent with the Reformed tradition."⁶⁷ The World Alliance had come a long way since Barth addressed it at Cardiff in 1925. But in a very real sense it had got back to the Reformation struggle for the true church as against the false, to the church as "a site of struggle," and to the problem with which we began our reflections—the segregation of the Reformed church on South Africa even though it went against both Scripture and the confessions.

Many have found it difficult to refer to apartheid as a heresy, not because they approve of apartheid—quite the contrary—but because they find the category of heresy inappropriate. For some it is, in fact, too medieval, too reminiscent of the Inquisition, witch-hunts, and the like. For others it is inappropriate because apartheid is seen as a political rather than an ecclesiastical issue. In response to the first objection it should be said that while heresy is a word which conjures up much which we would prefer to relegate

⁶⁵ The Confession of 1967, arts. 9.43-9.47. *The Book of Confessions* (United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Second edition, 1970).

⁶⁶ See Daniel L. Migliore, "Jesus Christ, the Reconciling Liberator: The Confession of 1967 and Theologies of Liberation," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, vol. 61, no. 1 (Spring 1983), pp. 38f.

⁶⁷ Quoted in de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, p. 88. See also the Foreword by Allan Boesak.

to the distant pages of ecclesiastical history, it is a word which the church needs in order to state categorically that a false choice has been made. For that is literally what a heresy means. If the church is committed to the truth of the gospel, it must likewise be willing to identify and reject falsehood.

In response to the second objection it should be pointed out that the slogan "apartheid is a heresy" refers specifically to its theological justification within the life of the church, and its embodiment in the structures of the church. Apartheid as a political ideology is, from a Christian point of view, evil and sinful. However, its theological justification and ecclesiastical embodiment is heresy.⁶⁸ Heresy is a category that only makes sense within the life of the church, for it has to do with the struggle between the true and false church. But we must go further. A truly Reformed confession of faith is not "a hole in the corner affair," it is a public event irrespective of whether or not the public recognizes its significance. It is public because it arises out of a particular social and historical context. Thus, the struggle for truth against heresy within the church relates to social realities and struggles beyond the church. In a profound sense, the church struggle in South Africa epitomizes the struggle for South Africa.

After the meeting at Ottawa, several member churches of the WARC in South Africa affirmed its decision and declared apartheid a heresy. The *Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk*, which, together with the Dutch Reformed Church, had been suspended by the WARC, resigned its membership. The Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) itself sought to find ways out of the dilemma in which it was now placed. But of particular importance, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church drafted a new Confession, the Belhar Confession of Faith adopted by the Church in 1986, which brought its century-long history around full-circle and contradicted the very reason for its formation and existence.

V. BELHAR: CONNECTING REFORMED AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The adoption of the Belhar Confession by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church was an historic event because it was the first time in the history of the Dutch Reformed family of churches since the seventeenth century that a new confession had been adopted by one of its member churches as an authoritative standard of faith and practice.⁶⁹ Thus it has become not only a

⁶⁸ See the essays by Simon Maimela, Charles Villa-Vicencio, and John W. de Gruchy, in de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*.

⁶⁹ On the background to the Belhar Confession and the issues which it raises, see D. J. Cloete and D. J. Smit, *A Moment of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984).

confession whose acceptance is necessary for ordination, but one which is determinative in the discussions pertaining to the uniting of black and white Dutch Reformed churches. Its significance can only be truly appreciated, however, when it is related to the segregationist origins of the church in the nineteenth century and its formation in 1881. For the Belhar Confession categorically rejects the Synodical decision of 1857 to allow segregation in the church, it equally rejects apartheid as a heresy, and it affirms the true nature of the church's unity and mission: a confession of Jesus as Lord and a commitment to the struggle for God's justice in the world.

But the Belhar Confession is also significant for another reason. It reinterprets the confession of Jesus Christ from the liberating perspective of a commitment to the poor. In this we see a creative Reformed response to the challenge of liberation theology. Faithfulness to Jesus Christ made known through Word and Spirit has to relate not only to the struggle against apartheid, but the God who has revealed himself in Christ is "in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged" and "calls his Church to follow him in this." This means that the Church must therefore

stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the Church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice . . .

that the Church as the possession of God must stand where he stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.⁷⁰

In the light of this we are able to discern why it is that the unity of the church is contingent upon its faithful confessing of Christ not only in relation to racism, but also poverty and other forms of social injustice. Here we see in unambiguous terms how the faith and the structure of the church are inseparable, and why the racial separation of the churches and its theological legitimization is a heresy. Here, too, we see the extent to which church order and unity in turn impinge upon the social and political situation in South

⁷⁰ The Belhar Confession, article 4.

Africa. For if black and white are baptized into the same Christ they are part of the same church, privileged to share in the same eucharist, and this means that there can no longer be any theological grounds for segregation in society.

Baptism, which has become such a private, ecclesiastical affair, rightly becomes once again a public event, a confessing event, with far-reaching social implications. Already at the Synod of Dort in 1619 Calvinist divines had decided that the baptism of a slave necessitated that slave being set free.⁷¹ Thus the early Dutch settlers at the Cape knew that if you baptized slaves it would require their liberty; if you baptized black persons, it would not only mean their entry into the "body of Christ," but it would also require their acceptance into the body politic. Hence their reluctance to engage in evangelism! A true understanding of baptism not only undermines apartheid in the church; it should undermine apartheid in society, and all other forms of oppression as indicated by Paul in Galatians 3:27f. For baptism is a sign of human solidarity redeemed in Christ.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper, which should be the sacrament of Christian community transcending all human barriers, was likewise reduced to an individualistic rite engaged in by members of the same ethnic group. A means of grace was turned into an instrument of disgrace. Hendrikus Berkhof sees a common eucharistic thread binding the conflict between Jews and Christians in the New Testament, with the Confessing Church in Germany, and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa:

From the struggle of the Confessing Church under the Nazis we remember how the open admission of Christian Jews to the Lord's Supper became the first test in the clash of spirits. In our day the meal serves a similar disclosing function in the *apartheid* problematic in South Africa.⁷²

No wonder that at the Ottawa Conference of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982 the catalyst for the debate on the heresy of apartheid was the eucharist. There could be no genuine communion without community in the truth of the gospel and therefore solidarity in the struggle against the heresy of apartheid.

The unity of the white and black Dutch Reformed Churches has been one of considerable controversy over the past fifteen years. It has now be-

⁷¹ See Richard Elphick & Hermann Giliomee, *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1820*, p. 120.

⁷² Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 364.

come not simply a matter of union, but also a matter of a confession which explicitly rejects the Dutch Reformed Church's historic ties with apartheid. Whereas previously the various Churches were bound by the same historic confessions, the Belhar Confession has made church union dependent upon the white church rejecting apartheid totally. That is not simply an ecclesiastical or theological issue, but also one which is also highly politicized. There are, however, some ironic twists in the whole matter. The first irony is the fact that the *N.G. Sendingkerk* and the other Dutch Reformed black mission churches have now become recognized as the *authentic* representatives of that tradition in South Africa within the World Alliance. The second irony is that the issues which divide are no longer simply those which separate black from white. They divide whites as well as blacks, they also unite whites and blacks, on both sides. In other words, the issue can no longer be reduced to racism; it also has to do with other forms of oppression. Thus an Occasional Bulletin of the Belydende Kring points out that while apartheid is the first major obstacle to church unity, the matter goes much deeper.

The theology of the Confession of Belhar is now struggling to gain dominance over what the Kairos Document called "church theology." It is the traditional pietism, fundamentalism, biblicism and individualistic moralism which the white missionaries bequeathed to black Christians, and which black Christians took over uncritically. Black preachers preach this old-style faith ad nauseum, thinking that it is the equivalent to "sola Scriptura" reformed theology. The spirit of the Belhar Confession, that God struggles on the side of all those who struggle against apartheid, is still foreign to the very church which produced the Confession. . . .⁷³

It would be wrong to conclude that the conflict between the unity and the faithful confession of the church is confined to the Dutch Reformed family of churches. It is not only much more universal, but it is also true within the other Reformed churches in South Africa. By way of example we may refer to the fact that the proposed union between the majority white Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa and the majority black United Congregational Church of Southern Africa ground to a halt in 1986 for reasons not unlike those which kept the white and black Dutch Reformed churches apart. It was never officially stated that race or politics was the

⁷³ *Belydende Kring Occasional Bulletin*, 1. nd.

issue, but there were clear indications that many white Presbyterians feared being dominated by a black majority in the united church. This was despite the fact that over the years the Presbyterian Church has adopted some important resolutions in opposition to apartheid. An important moment of truth and opportunity was squandered. Even if the so-called English-speaking churches, and that includes both the Presbyterian and Congregational churches, are not guilty of condoning the heresy of apartheid, they have to confess their guilt in the struggle to overcome the hypocrisy of confessing "Lord, Lord!" but not doing what the Lord of the church requires.

The Belhar Confession is the confession of a particular church denomination, but it has important ecumenical significance and potential. As a confessional document it could become the basis for a united Reformed Church in South Africa, and in that respect it is different from the Kairos Document. It is also different for another reason. While it is part of the theological continuum which leads from Cottesloe to the Kairos Document, and which parallels the development of the crisis brought about by apartheid, resistance, and repression, and which is symbolized by Sharpeville, Soweto, and the State of Emergency, it stops short of the more radical conclusions to which the Kairos Document finally comes. Yet it provides a vital link between the Reformed tradition and liberation theology in South Africa. It has, in fact, opened up fresh possibilities for the emergence not only of a united Reformed church but also for an ecumenical confessing church which transcends traditional confessional boundaries—but, by the same token, recognizes other boundaries of division and conflict in the same way as happened with the Barmen Declaration. Whether or not The Belhar Confession actually achieves its potential is another matter, of course, which has to do with whether or not the opportunity it offers is grasped.

Ulrich Duchrow rightly perceives that "the apartheid system in southern Africa is only the microcosm of the world system."⁷⁴ By this he means that racism and economic exploitation in South Africa is linked to the worldwide oppression of people, and that if apartheid is the reason for a *status confessionis* in South Africa, then it implicates the church universal. But it implicates the church universal not simply because of its connection with the church in South Africa and its concern for the situation, but because of the possibility of a *status confessionis* in its own backyard. The critical task of theology in the life of the church is to enable the church to discern precisely and concretely "when a situation becomes a clear case for confession (*casus*

⁷⁴ Ulrich Duchrow, *Conflict over the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981), p. 342.

confessionis), a situation calling for the *status confessionis*.”⁷⁵ This is when the struggle within the church reaches a new moment of intensity and clarity, the point, indeed, where the tension between maintaining the unity of the church and its confession of the truth and its solidarity in the struggle for justice is put to its most serious test.

VI. JUDGMENT BEGINS WITH THE CHURCH

Throughout this article we have stressed that both Luther and Calvin were aware of the conflictual character of the church. For them the Reformation was a struggle between the true and false church within the one church of Jesus Christ. While they may have hoped that once the Reformation was complete, conflict would subside, the very fact that they proclaimed the necessity for the church to be always reforming suggests that they saw this struggle as part of the very nature of the church, though the immediate cause for the conflict may vary greatly.

In recent times it has become commonplace to speak of the church as a “site of struggle,” a phrase we have already used several times. This means that the struggle for liberation, justice, and truth in the world is not simply a struggle between the church and the powers of the world beyond its boundaries, but a struggle within the life of the church itself—a struggle for the soul of the church which relates to the social struggles of the world. This is not clearly recognized in times of relative harmony and peace, though the struggle may then reach new and subtle depths, but in times of social and political crisis it becomes intensely apparent. The church struggle in Germany, South Africa, and Latin America has shown that the conflict with the state is a conflict within the church as well. This becomes clear the moment the church begins to identify with the struggle for justice in society, as Christians throughout the world have discovered anew in recent years.

The Kairos Document, contrary to some of its critics, did not create the conflict in the church in South Africa. It recognized and gave expression to it. “What the present crisis shows up, although many of us have known it all along, is that *the Church is divided*.”⁷⁶ By this is not meant the disunity of different denominations, but division within the life of the churches brought about by different social interests and different understandings of the gospel. An historic process is repeating itself because present denominational and confessional differences, however rooted they may be in matters of doctrine, were also the products of social forces in their period of historical

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ The Kairos Document, p. 1.

formation.⁷⁷ Present battle lines are no longer coterminous with these confessional boundaries of the past, but products of fresh understandings of the gospel arising within a new historical context and shaped by different social perceptions, political commitments, material interests, and praxis.

For the Kairos Document the crisis has shown that the church is divided against itself in terms of the way in which it perceives and responds to the critical public and political questions of the day. These have become the confessional issues because they have to do with what it means to confess Jesus Christ as Lord concretely and in context. In particular the Kairos Document focuses on the church's relationship to the struggle against racial and other forms of oppression. It is no longer simply apartheid as an ideology which is the *status confessionis*, but the *praxis* of the church in response to the oppression which apartheid has created. "Church theology," as the Kairos Document rightly points out, also condemns apartheid, but its praxis undermines its confession and prevents it from actually helping to get rid of apartheid.⁷⁸

The nature of the present conflict in the church is complex. Yet it is possible to distinguish between those who regard the gospel as socially liberating and transformative, those who link faith and the struggle for justice, and those who do not. Amongst the latter are the advocates of a right-wing form of Christianity for whom the watchwords are uncritical patriotism, uncritical anti-communism, anti-ecumenism, and an authoritarian fundamentalism. This brand of Christianity is particularly virulent in Latin America and South Africa at present, having been imported in large doses from the United States during the last decade.⁷⁹

There is, as the Kairos Document recognized, another large group of Christians who might reject oppression and racism in principle, but who seek to be neutral in their political commitments and uninvolved in the struggle for liberation and justice. Many Christians take the position that the church should work for justice and reconciliation, but not by taking sides which would undermine and destroy the unity of the church. We have yet to consider the role of the church within the political arena as such. Yet, as Albert Nolan has rightly observed. "If the Church, or part of the Church, were to begin to relate its preaching and its sacraments directly to the con-

⁷⁷ See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Meridian, fourth printing, 1960).

⁷⁸ See Sheila Briggs' contribution to *The Kairos Covenant*, Willis H. Logan, ed. (New York: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988), pp. 80ff.

⁷⁹ See Paul Gifford, *The Religious Right in Southern Africa* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1988); *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, No. 69, December 1989.

crete realities of life in South Africa today in a way that is honest, bold and consistent, the immediate result would be division and dissension."⁸⁰ Hence the dilemma of church leaders who seek to speak prophetically and, at the same time, maintain the sometimes fragile unity of the church. Nolan recognizes the dilemma but sees no easy way out of it if the church is to remain faithful to the gospel.

That the Church should become a site of struggle is regrettable, but the fact of the matter is that we are not all on the same side and we do not all believe in the same gospel. What we have in common is a longing to be faithful to Jesus Christ and perhaps a loyalty to the same Church tradition, such as Catholicism or the Reformed tradition. For the rest, we are divided and we shall have to confront one another and struggle against all forms of 'worldliness' and blindness that have crept into the Church because of the system.

Conflict in the life of the church is part of its historic identity, or better, it is how its identity was and continues to be shaped.⁸¹

Speaking theologically we may say that the judgment or crisis experienced by the world is or should always be experienced first within the life of the church. It is the *kairos* moment which arises during times of crisis (*krisis* = judgment), the moment of truth which requires decisive response in word and deed in terms of which the church is to be judged by God as true or false. It is, in fact, the *status confessionis* of the Reformation which impels the church to be continually reforming according to the Word of God. For the church is called to be the pioneer of the new age. Commenting on I Peter 4:17: "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God," Calvin writes "that the beginning of the reformation should be in the church." This being so, God "deals more strictly with his own people under the discipline of the Cross."⁸² Such judgment is the necessary prelude to redemption, the means whereby the church becomes an instrument for the salvation of the world.

The historical purpose of God's reconciling action in Jesus Christ was, and remains, to create a new humanity out of people and nations divided by ethnicity, culture, gender, and material interests. But this does not imply that these sources of alienation are sanctified; it requires that they surrender their absolute status and claims. It therefore requires a conversion which

⁸⁰ Nolan, *God in South Africa*, pp. 214f.

⁸¹ See Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), chapter 9, where he deals with "Conflict in the Church."

⁸² *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews and I and II Peter*, trans. by W. B. Johnston, p. 311.

transforms people in relation to their historical and social location and interests. The reconciliation in Christ which lies at the heart of the unity of the church is not Platonic, nor invisible, nor based on neutrality with regard to the issues and conflicts within the world. Reconciliation which is God's gift of grace becomes an ecclesiological reality through repentance, conversion, and engagement in the struggle for justice.

In order for the church to fulfill its vocation as the sign of God's reconciliation and sanctification of the world, it therefore can neither remain neutral to the issues of oppression and injustice, nor can it remain within some ethnic or class ghetto, but must reach out and embrace all of humanity in such a way that the powers which divide and dehumanize are not only transcended but defeated. Yet it is called to do so not from the side of the powerful, that is, not as a Constantinian church, but as a church of the victims of society, a church which is truly for the people. In doing so, however, the church draws into its very life the factions and interests which divide sinful humanity, it embodies the conflict, as it were, as God's representative, in order that the whole of humanity might be transformed by the gospel and brought under the reign of God.

We must rework the Reformation doctrine of the church by saying that the true church only exists where the Word is rightly proclaimed as the liberating Word, and the Sacraments duly administered as signs of God's transforming grace in society as in each person who believes. It is precisely this commitment and character of the church under the liberating Word in Jesus Christ which opens up not only the possibility but also the necessity for the church to be for and of the people. José Miguez Bonino has expressed this well:

the greater the church's identification with Jesus Christ, the more the church will be driven to an identification with the common people; the more the church is identified with the people, the more it will be in a position to reflect the identity of its Lord. Identity pushes towards identification, and identification is the matrix of authentic identity.

He continues:

It will not try to absorb the people into it, nor will it proclaim itself to be the "leader" of the people. Instead it will structure itself as a community of faith and incarnate itself in the very midst of the people, giving impetus to the quest of the Kingdom from there.⁸³

⁸³ José Miguez Bonino, "Fundamental Questions in Ecclesiology" in Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds., *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (New York: Orbis, 1982), pp. 147f.

A liberating Reformed ecclesiology is one in which obedience to Jesus Christ through the Word and Spirit, and solidarity in the struggle for justice and liberation, come together in critical coherence. The more Reformed churches take God's "preferential option" for particular groups who are disadvantaged and oppressed in a given historical context, the more they identify with Christ and open up the possibility that they will become churches not only for but also of the people. That means that even a bourgeois Reformed church, without seeking to dominate "the poor" or oppressed, should take definite steps to be in solidarity with them, and to begin to celebrate with them the hope of God's liberation.

VII. THE CELEBRATION OF HOPE IN SOLIDARITY

We began by recounting the occasion in 1982 when, at the Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, eleven South Africans refused to participate in Holy Communion. The reason they gave was that the eucharist, instead of being a sign of unity in Christ and therefore solidarity in the struggle against apartheid, had itself become a reason for racial division and a sign of dis-grace. Some may well argue that the eucharist should not be abused for the sake of protest, and that all come to the table of the Lord as sinners in need of forgiveness and grace. Yet those in the Reformed tradition would do well to reflect on the fact that the medieval Mass was precisely the focus for Calvin's protest against idolatry. In the same way, R. Avila, a Catholic Latin American liberation theologian, speaks of the celebration of the eucharist as "a loud cry of alarm and of protest," indeed, "one that is extremely dangerous for every inhuman and oppressive system."⁸⁴ Why? Because it brings us face to face with the reality of the cross, a reality which calls into question everything which dehumanizes people and destroys community. It demonstrates the basic contradictions in a society which claims to be Christian, but which is unable to celebrate its solidarity in Christ's death and resurrection in the eucharistic meal.

Much of our attention in this essay has been focused on the struggle for the church in terms of faithfulness to Jesus Christ as Lord, a faithfulness expressed in a true confession and prophetic *praxis*. This may unfortunately give the impression that the church is a matter of words and deeds rather than a community of worship and spiritual empowerment. But nothing would be further from the vision which Calvin had for the church, nor from

⁸⁴ R. Avila, *Worship and Politics* (New York: Orbis, 1981), p. 84.

the ecclesiology which has emerged in recent times in Latin American liberation theology.

The evangelical confession and prophetic proclamation of the church, in both word and deed, arises out of the worship and communal life of the church, and, in turn, informs that worship and common life. For Calvin worship and mission belonged together, eucharistic celebration and ethics could not be separated,⁸⁵ the struggle against dehumanizing idols and the worship of the true God belonged together.⁸⁶ Unfortunately this is too often not the case in the Reformed tradition.

A great deal of Calvin's work as a reformer had to do with the renewal of worship, and in this regard, as in other aspects of the Reformation, he sought to return to the liturgical forms of the ancient church in a way which expressed the fresh insights of the Reformation and the local needs of the church.⁸⁷ Of particular importance for him was the need for the eucharist to become a public rather than a private occasion, a community rather than an individualistic event, a means of inward transformation which led to obedience rather than a matter of outward show and ritual, an act which included the participation of the whole people of God and a means of grace in which all shared.⁸⁸

For Calvin, the eucharist meant both the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. But if Calvin insisted that the Word always be proclaimed at the sacrament, he also believed that Holy Communion should be celebrated each Sunday, and that infrequent communion was of the devil.⁸⁹ As is well known, he was unable to introduce this in Geneva because of opposition from the city fathers who, ironically, as Catholics had only been used to participation in the Mass on the high festivals of the church. Nevertheless, the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacrament remained Calvin's norm for what constituted Sunday worship. The separation of the two, so that preaching alone has become normative, has been tragic for the Reformed tradition. It has reduced much worship to a cerebral didactic occasion, instead of a joyful cel-

⁸⁵ See Elsie A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneve: Libraries Droz. S.A., 1984); see also McKee, *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 27f.

⁸⁶ Carlos M. N. Eire, *War against the Idols* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 195ff.

⁸⁷ William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 112f.

⁸⁸ See McDonnell, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

⁸⁹ *Institutes*, first edition, 1536, chapter iv, pp. 112f.

eboration of the crucified and risen Christ in the Spirit. Nicholas Wolterstorff is correct:

One of the major results of Vatican II has been that the Catholic church has taken a giant step in its liturgy in the direction of Protestantism. Next to the Swiss Reform, the liturgical reform of Vatican II is the greatest in the history of the church. I am profoundly convinced that we Protestants must now take an equally large step in the direction of Catholicism—or rather, in the direction of our common ancient tradition—by reinstituting the Lord's Supper as a regular part of the church's liturgy.⁹⁰

Wolterstorff reminds us that for Calvin "reality was drenched with sacramality," and that therefore it is precisely in the sacramental life of the church that its commitment to the world and the whole of creation is most strongly affirmed.⁹¹ Thus, there was for Calvin as there must be for the Reformed tradition, a close connection between the eucharist and economic sharing.⁹² In fact, the true celebration of the supper of the Lord is the rejection of idolatry at its deepest level, for the "breaking of bread" and the sharing of bread with the hungry are a rejection of human greed and covetousness.⁹³ Calvin put it in these words in his *Institutes*:

We shall benefit very much from the Sacrament if this thought is impressed and engraved upon our minds; that none of the brethren can be injured, despised, rejected, abused, or in any way offended by us, without at the same time, injuring, despising, and abusing Christ by wrongs we do; that we cannot disagree with our brethren without at the same time disagreeing with Christ; that we cannot love Christ without loving him in the brethren; that we ought to take the same care of our brethren's bodies as we take care of our own; for they are members of our body.⁹⁴

However important ethics is for a true understanding of eucharistic worship, the ultimate focus is not upon the call to faithfulness but upon the grace and worship of God. Worship without ethical obedience becomes

⁹⁰ N. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 161.

⁹¹ Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁹² Andre Bieler, *The Social Humanism of Calvin* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), pp. 37f.

⁹³ See Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37:329; see Leith, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁹⁴ *Institutes*, IV/xvii/38.

idolatry, but ethics alone is not worship and can so easily degenerate into self-righteous legalism without it. We recognize the need for worship to find expression in social witness, but for Christians "a similar liturgical condition" must be "placed on the authenticity of the struggle for justice and peace."⁹⁵ Worship without the struggle against injustice is unacceptable to God, but what about social activism which does not lead to worship? Wolterstorff rightly perceives that we all have a great deal to learn at this point from the Orthodox tradition, with its profound sense of doxology as the heart of theology and ethics. For theology to become doxology, Calvin insisted, it first had to be iconoclastic. But iconoclasm is by no means the end of theology, it is only the prelude to true worship in which the praise of God becomes the all in all. Reformed and liberation theology, when they are truly theology, find each other not only in ethical obedience, but in ethical obedience grounded in doxology.

⁹⁵ Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

The Voluntary Principle and the Search for Racial Justice

by PETER J. PARIS

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VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS are essential marks of a democracy. Unlike the two natural associations of family and state, voluntary associations imply the experience of public freedom and individual choice.¹ The striking novelty associated with the so-called "democratic experiment" in the nascent United States was the ubiquitous function of the voluntary principle throughout the society. In describing this phenomenon Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in the 1830's,

In no other country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully used or applied to a greater multitude of objects than in America. . . .

The citizen of the United States is taught from infancy to rely upon his own exertions in order to resist the evils and the difficulties of life; he looks upon the social authorities with an eye of mistrust and anxiety, and he claims its assistance only when he is unable to do without it. This habit may be traced even in the schools, where the children in their games are wont to submit to rules which they have themselves established, and to punish misdemeanors which they have themselves defined. . . . In the United States associations are established to promote the public safety, commerce, industry, morality and religion. There is no end which the human will despair of attaining through the combined power of individuals united into a society.²

Tocqueville concluded that everything in America was republican including its religion and that was a most surprising discovery for him since the spirit of freedom that expressed itself in the French Revolution had not extended to religion. Rather, the church in France had continued to enjoy

¹ Most of the salient characteristics of voluntary associations are set forth in an essay entitled "The Nature of Voluntary Associations" by Karl Hertz in D. B. Robinson (ed.), *Voluntary Associations: A Study of Groups in Free Societies: Essays in Honor of James Luther Adams* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1966), pp. 17ff. This author is also indebted to several other essayists in the above volume as well as the works of James Luther Adams, often called "the father of voluntary associations."

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1 (N.Y.: A Vintage Book, 1945), pp. 198-199.

its place of transcendence over the state in contrast to the separation of church and state that had developed in the United States. Hence, de Tocqueville admitted surprise in his discovery that one meets a politician every time one meets a priest in the United States because the latter had to rely on the art of persuasion rather than the command of authority as the first principle of effective leadership. More importantly, the voluntary principle implied an egalitarian society that permitted no entitlements of governance to political, social, or religious elites. Rather, individual choice was to govern all associational relations. In other words, the freedom of individuals to choose both their political and religious associations relativized the traditional authority of each and, hence, grounded both in an understanding of humanity that was heavily indebted to the political philosophy that stemmed from the Enlightenment.

I

The primacy of the voluntary principle in associational life subjects all authority to the will of the people. When institutionalized, this principle presupposes the conditions of freedom of speech and association including that of religious liberty and political dissent. Under such conditions, all agree that freedom of the press, freedom to vote on all public matters, freedom to function on juries, and freedom of worship are the essential rights of all citizens. Inevitably, such an understanding of freedom has shaped an ethos in American society wherein most are suspicious of all authority and strongly opposed to any authority that is not subject to the will of the people. The rise of political parties and religious denominations in the United States is expressive of this voluntary principle.³ Certain economic philosophies, bureaucratic and military procedures, as well as some ecclesial traditions find themselves in tension with the implications of voluntarism whenever they are pressed to justify their heteronomy. Interestingly, many ecclesiastical hierarchies in the United States receive their legitimation directly from the people whom they lead.

Clearly, every form of heteronomous rule abhors dissent and, consequently, must rely on some form of effective coercion in order to maintain itself. In the interest of order, heteronomy views dissent as illegitimate. Under such conditions, all social reform must be initiated by those who rule.

³ See James Luther Adams, "The Voluntary Principle in the Forming of American Religion" in Edwin A. Smith (ed.), *The Religion of the Republic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 217ff. See also Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1963), Chapters VII and VIII.

Such leadership from the top down kills imagination and creativity and takes responsibility away from the ruled, who are inevitably viewed either as innocents or rebels. Hence, the rate of social change is necessarily slow. Democratic governance, on the other hand, encourages its people to be continuously vigilant concerning public affairs and to exercise their freedom of speech and of association in initiating social criticism and, through the art of persuasion, generate public support and action. That is to say, in a democracy, the starting point for social change is the perceived discontent of some people relative to a *felt* issue which, in turn, leads to the expenditure of energy aimed at bringing this felt issue to public visibility and thereby creating a public issue; i.e., one supported by a plurality of people acting together for its effective resolution. Such cooperative activity constitutes the purpose of voluntary associations even though it must be noted that social change is not always the aim of all voluntary associations. On the contrary, voluntary associations may have innumerable purposes ranging from those that are strictly private and professional (i.e., bent on supporting and promoting some form of the status quo, to say nothing about those that seek to prevent others from sharing some particular benefit or right) to those that expressly aim at social transformation. In short, voluntary associations do not exhibit a shared moral ethos. The common characteristic among all of them is people organizing their own groups for their own purposes. In this respect, voluntary associations represent manifest freedom. Most importantly, they evidence the rights of all to dissent and to mobilize public support for social change. Respect for pluralistic perspectives on public issues inheres in the voluntary principle. It is evident, however, that leadership from the bottom up constantly threatens social coherence and social order. Thus, their strong affirmation of pluralism implies strong support for social conflict with respect to public issues.⁴

II

Unfortunately, the experience of freedom has not always been available to all persons and groups in the United States.⁵ For nearly a century following the period of reconstruction, the majority of African-Americans living

⁴ See George H. Williams, "The Religious Background of the Idea of a Loyal Opposition," in D. B. Robertson (ed.), *Voluntary Associations: A Study of Groups in Free Societies* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1966), pp. 55ff.

⁵ See Charles H. Long, "Civil Rights-Civil Religion: Visible People and Visible Religions," in Russell E. Richey and Donald G. James (eds.), *American Civil Religion* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 211ff.

in the former states of the old confederacy were systematically disenfranchised and socially oppressed both by law and customary practice. These and similar conditions prohibited viable public associational life among African-Americans. The latter were permitted, however, to organize churches and selected other associations as long as they posed no threat to the social order and its customs. It was not uncommon for the legal and judicial authorities to ban certain groups when they failed to live up to the expectations of the white majority. Legal controls were aided and abetted by the vigilante activity of the Ku Klux Klan, a constant source of terrorist threat.

In spite of these many strictures, however, the Montgomery Improvement Association in close alliance with the black churches emerged in 1956 in the heart of the old Alabama confederacy for the purpose of challenging the laws and customs of racial segregation and discrimination. As the precursor to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, formed in 1957 by Martin Luther King, Jr., it was dedicated to the purpose of extending the Montgomery struggle for racial justice throughout the South.⁶

Interestingly, King's work was supported morally and financially by many religious and civic associations outside the environs of the southern states. In fact, King and his followers relied heavily on the U.S. Supreme Court and the Attorney General's office for supportive leadership and worked diligently to persuade Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy to act decisively in support of the goals of racial justice. Eventually, the long-awaited leadership from Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, followed by the Civil Rights bills of 1964 and 1965, provided the long-desired legitimation from both the executive and congressional branches of government.⁷ But one should not suppose that such came either easily or early in their struggle. Clearly, the moral legitimation of both the churches (white and black) and the state were important sources of encouragement for both King and his non-violent resistance movement whose goal was the eradication of the socio-political system euphemistically called "Jim Crow."

Contrary to popular opinion in the South, many in the North and around the world viewed King and his followers as courageous social-change agents

⁶ This story is told best by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1958).

⁷ This is a recurrent theme in the masterful study of Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters: American in the King Years, 1954-63* (N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1988), see pp. 181-183; 219-222; 399-400. See also Martin Luther King, Jr.'s agreement with this judgment which he expressed in "A Testament of Hope" in James M. Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 320.

worthy of emulation. In spite of their destiny of having to suffer immensely at the hands of Bull Connor's dogs and water hoses, Sheriff Pritchard's whips and jailings, bombings of homes and churches, brutal beatings and many martyrs, the movement eventually assumed the character of a non-violent holy crusade. Before long it became a matter of moral virtue for many whites throughout the nation to express their solidarity with this non-violent resistance movement by marching in support of civil rights for black Americans. Not surprisingly, blacks who advocated the use of violence as a measure of self-defense (i.e., some SNCC leaders and Malcolm X) received no legitimation whatsoever from the white society. In fact, such advocates were invariably condemned forthrightly. Clearly, whites were not disposed to fight another civil war in order to ensure the civil rights of black Americans and the latter generally knew that they were too small a minority to wage an effective battle independently. Hence, the Civil Rights Movement and its leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., conjoined the African-American tradition of moral suasion with the novel and creative activity of non-violent direct resistance in a most successful way; methods, incidently, that are essential marks of voluntary associations; i.e., freedom to dissent and to protest.

Yet in the South, a generalized social consensus characterized the vast majority of whites relative to the quest for racial justice. In fact, the majority of southern whites seemed to oppose virtually everything that characterized the thought and action of Martin Luther King, Jr. They rightly saw that the so-called "Civil Rights Movement" posed a major threat to the social order. Like King and his followers, these often appealed to both biblical and ecclesial traditions as religious and moral grounds for justifying their opposing position. These conflicting traditions necessitated adjudication by the superior legal authorities of the nation, namely, the United States Congress and the Supreme Court.

The most obvious contemporary example of a similar struggle in the quest for racial justice is the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Unlike the American struggle, the opponents of constitutional apartheid can appeal to no legitimate authority within the Republic of South Africa for either moral or legal support. As with every state, legitimation is derived from the law. Hence, anti-apartheid activities have long been rendered unlawful by the constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Consequently, many nonviolent protesters in that land have been tried for treason (punishable by the death penalty) because their objections did not aim at legal re-

form but, rather, the need for a new constitution.⁸ Lest there be doubt about this matter, the Government of South Africa has frequently declared national states of emergency in order to give law enforcement officials unlimited powers in terminating civil protests.

Following his first visit to South Africa in 1985, James Cone, the progenitor of the black theology movement, said that being in South Africa made him imagine what it would have been like for a black American to be in the South during the 1940's and 1950's with no North.⁹ That is a graphic description of one of the major differences between the two struggles. All moral and religious support for the anti-apartheid movement from outside the country is devoid of legitimacy by the ruling elites. Hence, the latter considers all such persons as enemies of the state; i.e., revolutionaries in both the form and aim of their protests. In South Africa no appeal to either rational or religious sources can be effective in changing the moral and religious perspectives of the proponents of apartheid. As with similar struggles elsewhere, few converts are made from either side by persuasion alone. Even appeals to majority rule (i.e., one person, one vote) as a self-evident democratic principle can have no credibility in a society that excludes the majority of the population from citizenship. Had the southern states been successful in seceding from the union in the 1860's and had they constituted themselves into a sovereign nation with a constitution legitimating racial segregation and discrimination, the result would have been strikingly similar to the Republic of South Africa in our day.

The moral and religious problem evident in the above comparison is that of conflict between moral and religious traditions. When religious and moral understandings between and among plural communities are diametrically opposed to one another, how can such be effectively resolved? More specifically, in both South Africa and the United States, opposing racial groups have regularly appealed to common source materials (i.e., the Bible and ecclesial tradition) to justify contradictory societal practices and perspectives. No attempt will be made in this essay to determine original causation of either. Suffice it to say that rigorous consistency of argument attends both sides of the conflict and, in each case, both positions can be

⁸ To date, none of the constitutional planks of apartheid have been dismantled in spite of the release of Nelson Mandela from twenty-seven years of imprisonment (along with selected others) and the unbanning of political organizations.

⁹ James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 164.

argued either deductively (i.e., from theological position to social practice) or inductively (i.e., from social practice to theological position). Clearly, neither side can gain the loyalty of the other side by moral and religious suasion alone. Other relevant resources must be employed.

III

Now, if the practical problem of racial justice cannot be solved by theological and ethical appeals alone, then on what additional agency should one rely for effective social change? We contend that para-political agency is the key to the answer we seek. In other words, the issue of racial justice must become a public issue with sufficient breadth of perspective, depth of analysis, and popular appeal in order to attain the desired goal. What then, are the basic conditions and capacities for such activity? Freedom of speech and of association are necessary conditions for the type of public debate and deliberation that is required. When these are denied, social change agents are forced to rely on illegal, clandestine activities as means to their desired goal. By definition, both their means and purposes are judged as radical by the established authorities. More often than not, these conditions lead social change agents to seriously consider the use of violence in pursuit of their goals. More moderate means of non-violent resistance, however, may often be effective in achieving moderate goals of social reform as evidenced in Martin Luther King's southern strategies. Curiously, similar moderate means of non-violent resistance may be effective in bringing about radical social change as revealed in the success of Mahatma Gandhi's movement in overthrowing British colonialism. The desire for broad-base association comprising a rich diversity of peoples and perspectives in search for a common life is a primary indicator of human capacity to construct a viable deliberate process for the continuous pursuit of that goal.

Whenever a moral, religious, and/or political conflict emerges between or among human communities, no lasting effective resolution can be had apart from the willingness of all relevant parties to negotiate a just outcome. Even if the groups should war against each other in a violent way, the final, lasting goal can only be an agreed-upon just peace. Conquest alone can never lead to a just peace, but, rather, two perpetually alienated groups: the conquerors and the conquered. The alienation is not overcome either by conquest or the threat thereof. That is why there can never be any peace under the conditions of tyranny in spite of certain social indicators implying the contrary.

Why is the political quest for a community of diverse peoples morally,

religiously, and politically good? More importantly, why should such a quest be preferred to that of maintaining and promoting a more homogeneous society? Our answer to that query is built, first of all, on the fact of human nature. Humans have the capacity to transcend their natural communities of family and tribal belonging by forging wider communities of belonging not by the brute force of conquest but by the persuasive art of design. In exercising that capacity, humans reveal their unique nature, namely, their capacity for establishing, nurturing, enhancing, and expanding moral communities. By so doing, humans overcome certain inclinations towards contentment with limited tribal and parochial experience.

Resources abound in the Judeo/Christian tradition supportive of narrow tribal religion, on the one hand (e.g., the election of Israel as God's chosen people and the various forms of Christian sectarianism); and supportive of a more universal community (e.g., Judeo/Christian God portrayed as Creator of all that is and, hence, divine parent of all peoples implying kinship relations among them all).¹⁰ Every form of racism, tribalism, sexism, nationalism, classism among Christians have appealed selectively to biblical and ecclesial traditions. That is to say, they wrench the specificity of Jewish or Christian tribal relations from the universal divine relation and its implications for world-wide community among all peoples. In doing so, they distort the Judeo/Christian tradition and advocate morally perverse social and political relations accordingly. Those who oppose the oppressive results of such narrow parochialism by pressing for a broader community of belonging are more faithful to the wholism implicitly and explicitly evident in the Judeo/Christian tradition. But the opposition to all forms of external control and the thrust for the reform of social systems are set in motion by persons and groups voluntarily acting in association with one another. Whenever reform comes from the top down, it necessarily reflects more the values and interests of the top than those at the bottom. This may not be totally bad by any means. In fact it may well be a good beginning. But change from the top down is almost never sufficient because the values and interest of those at the top and those at the bottom never coincide completely.

Now, the key element in understanding the nature of social change at

¹⁰ In my explication of the moral and religious tradition of the black churches, I have described the black Christian tradition as expressive of a non-racist biblical principle, "the parenthood of God and the kinship of all peoples" which has been institutionalized in the black churches, making them the only institutions in America rightly claiming a non-racist history. See *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

any time is the purposive activity of those voluntary associations whose primary aim is that of correcting some moral problem(s) in the social order. Such associations are the source of creative initiative and patient persistence in defining public issues, mobilizing support for those issues, advocating necessary correctives, and designing instrumentalities for effecting the desired changes. Their power lies in their capacity to energize their constituencies to coalesce around a common cause and participate in activities that disturb the regular patterns of thought and practices held by the relevant centers of power. By fomenting social conflict they seek legitimation for and redress of their moral claims. The more proximate goal of legitimation is sometimes realized when the relevant centers of power agree to negotiate and when the final objective is evidenced in a mutually satisfactory redress of the problem(s) through policy agreement. This process may be a relatively simple one, most often demonstrated in the arbitration process for resolving management-labor disputes, or as complex as the quest for civil rights for blacks in the United States, which necessitated the involvement of various levels of interconnected governmental and judicial processes all the way from local municipalities to the United States Congress, the Office of the President, and the Supreme Court. It is our hypothesis that both the form and rate of social change depend on the availability of viable voluntary associations, the validity of which requires the following conditions: (a) their legitimation and protection by law; (b) the absence of terrorist threats relative to the public expression of grievance; (c) the availability of an adequate number of courageous, self-conscious, discontented people desirous of improving the quality of the social order and morally disposed to act in pursuit of it.

With respect to racial justice, the form of its pursuit and the rate of progress in its attainment are directly proportionate to how free and courageous its advocates are, since the formation of voluntary associations with public purposes for effecting social change requires both freedom and courage. Let us hasten to say, however, that we assume that those on whom injustice is inflicted must always be the primary agents both in resisting the injustice and in advocating a just corrective.¹¹ Others who might join in solidarity with that quest can only serve auxiliary functions. They rarely initiate the quest for systematic change on behalf of others. Their acts of compassion

¹¹ Here the author reveals the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr's view of the morally deceptive and hypocritical nature of the privileged class which inevitably protects its own moral virtue through varying forms of rationalization. See his *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), Chapter V.

and support are always welcomed but should not be confused with the essential activity of the primary actors.

The primacy I give to voluntary associations as agents of social change implies an associational theory of society which I contend is the essence of any democratic community. Hence, the full realization of democracy in America for all its citizens comprised the *raison d'être* of the African-American struggle for liberation and justice; a struggle that was both then and now institutionalized in the black churches and their allied organizations.

Ironically, whenever legalized racial segregation of large concentrations occurred, there inevitably developed a parallel social system of segregated schools, colleges, trade schools, businesses, churches, the press, to mention only a few. E. Franklin Frazier and others concluded that there virtually developed within the United States "a nation within a nation" differentiated by the principle of race. South Africa's apartheid state exhibits the most blatant form of this pattern in our day. In each case, the constellation of segregated institutions unwittingly provided relatively independent spaces that nurtured an ethos of suspicion *vis-à-vis* the external racist world which, in turn, encouraged the spirit of criticism, humor, knowledge, and moral discernment concerning their respective social situations. Thus, some degree of critical social analysis and advocacy for social change appeared in some form or other throughout that segregated space. That ethos of criticism constituted the first principle for constructive thought and practice relative to the desired change.

IV

Assuming the laudable history of the black churches as institutional agents in the enduring struggle for racial justice and assuming their continuing primacy¹² as voluntary associations concerned with enhancing the quality of social justice in our black communities, let us turn to the contemporary moral and religious demand that the black churches need to accept if our blighted communities are to be restored to viable health. Clearly, the black churches have an enviable history as prophetic organizations demanding social justice via the art of moral suasion and varied forms of nonviolent resistance. The lawful demise of racial discrimination and segregation in the public domain marks a turning point in the public mission of the churches. The latter must now become more self-consciously political in the broad

¹² This assumption is strongly confirmed by the conclusions drawn by C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya in their massive empirical study of the black churches, *The Black Churches in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University, 1990).

sense of the word—i.e., a people's deliberate efforts to build structures for enhancing the quality of human association which, in turn, will provide the necessary conditions for the lives of all citizens to flourish.

This political function is not alien to the black tradition. In fact, W.E.B. DuBois argued that the church represented all that was left of African tribal life on these shores. Accordingly, he wrote:

As a social group the Negro church may be said to have antedated the Negro family functions. Its tribal functions are shown in its religious activity, its social authority and general guiding and coordinating work; its family functions are shown by the fact that the church is the center of social life and intercourse; acts as a newspaper and intelligence bureau, is the centre of amusements—indeed, is the world in which the Negro moves and acts. So far reaching are these functions that its organization is almost political.¹³

Although the black churches have traditionally addressed all sorts of public issues and although they have spearheaded numerous voter registration drives and voter education projects including endorsements of candidates, campaigning, poll watching, fund raising, etc., we propose that they must now intensify all of these latter efforts including the increased fielding of candidates for public office. This must now be done for theological, moral, and political reasons.

(a) *Theological Rationale*: The gospel of liberation and justice, long proclaimed by the black churches, implies institutionalization lest it be cast aside as an abstract, formal platitude devoid of historical appearance. As the black churches constituted the original institutional loci for a nonracist Christianity¹⁴ in sharp contrast to their white counterparts, and as they expressed their devotion to such a viewpoint in their moral support and engagement in a myriad of organizations and associations dedicated to the pursuit of social justice so, now, they must continue that tradition of enriching the public realm with their self-conscious involvement in all aspects of electoral politics. Undoubtedly, their experience in para-political activities can be immeasurably helpful in defining public issues and mobilizing support in their behalf. Even more importantly, these churches are peculiarly capable of making good moral judgments about human character and, ac-

¹³ Quotes from an essay by Kelly Miller Smith, "Religion As A Force in Black America" in James D. Williams (ed.), *The State of Black America, 1982* (N.Y.: National Urban League, Inc., 1982), p. 215.

¹⁴ See the author's *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) for a full description of this viewpoint.

cordingly, can exercise leadership by giving their blessings to men and women of integrity who view public service as an expression of their Christian devotion.

Such a venture implies many difficulties, none of which are insurmountable. In fact, the political experience and wisdom of such church leaders as former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, Congressmen Walter Fountroy, William Gray, John Lewis, Floyd Flake, Parren Mitchell, Mayor Andrew Young, nonvoting Senator for the District of Columbia, Jesse Jackson (to mention only a few) constitute a reservoir for critical thought and guidance. (Note that all of these stand in the tradition of such notable Reconstruction trail blazers as the Reverend Hiram Revels, first black U.S. Senator, the Reverend Richard Cain, who served both as State Senator and U.S. Congressman and the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who served with distinction in the U.S. Congress for over a quarter of a century [1944-1970]). That same black church that produced numerous prophets, educational and civic leaders, men and women of unusual practical wisdom, courage, and devotion, countless numbers of enthusiastic supporters from all walks of life, must now enhance its rhythm of social protest with the activity of political consolidation and expansion. In brief, the fathers and mothers of the liberation struggle must now pass the mantle to their successors: i.e., the "nation builders." These must occupy the seats of power in order to contribute to the task of constructing a good and just society wherein the socio-political structures will facilitate the well-being of all citizens and hinder none from actualizing their potentiality.

(b) *Moral Rationale*: The purpose of the good state should be that of enabling the good of all its citizens, i.e., the promotion of justice for all. Thus the purpose of good politics is ethical in nature, i.e., to help citizens to internalize the purpose of the state by becoming just persons themselves. The black churches and their allied associations have had excellent preparation for such a moral task, the most recent evidence of which being the process by which the Civil Rights Movement under the leadership of The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. effected a moral revolution in the nation's legal framework. For more than a decade, black church leaders rendered public service by giving persuasive moral fibre to the pressing issues of racial justice in the body politic. Their accomplishments marked the end of an era in American history and the beginning of a new epoch filled with potentiality. They must now become the torchbearers of a more substantive political agenda and exercise leadership for its actualization.

The aspect of their prophetic tradition that should serve black church

leaders well in this new mission is that public-regarding spirit that disposes them to seek justice for all citizens rather than the few alone. In fact, Martin Luther King, Jr. predicted the need for this present moment and saw political organization as the logical step following the legal guarantee of basic civil rights. Consequently, he called for such nonviolent expressions of resistance to evil as boycotts, peaceful demonstrations, individual and collective sacrifice, education and political organizations.

To produce change, people must be organized to work together in units of power. These units might be political, as in the case of voters' leagues and political parties; they may be economic units such as groups of tenants who join forces to form a tenant union or to organize a rent strike; or they may be laboring units of persons who are seeking employment and wage increases.

More and more the civil rights movement will be engaged in the task of organizing people into permanent groups to protect their own interests and to produce change in their behalf. This is a tedious task which may take years, but the results are more permanent and meaningful.¹⁵

And in his last SCLC Presidential address, King addressed the need for power.

Another basic challenge is to discover how to organize our strength in terms of economic and political power. No one can deny that the Negro is in dire need of this kind of legitimate power. Indeed, one of the great problems that the Negro confronts is his lack of power. From old plantations of the South to newer ghettos of the North, the Negro has been confined to a life of voicelessness and powerlessness. Stripped of the right to make decisions concerning his life and destiny, he has been subject to the authoritarian and sometimes whimsical decisions of this white power structure. . . . The problem of transforming the ghetto, therefore, is a problem of power.¹⁶

King then continues his discussion of power by offering a corrective to those clergy and others who view power as devoid of love and justice. Clearly influenced by Paul Tillich, King argues, "Now we've got to get this

¹⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Non-Violence: The Only Way to Freedom" in James M. Washington (ed.), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 60-61.

¹⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Where Do We Go From Here" in *Ibid.*, p. 246.

thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."¹⁷

(c) *Political Rationale*: Several years ago Professor Charles V. Hamilton drew an important correlation between American political leadership and that of the black churches by arguing that both were rooted in local organizational structures primarily concerned with the well-being of their constituents. Both political and religious leaders must maintain the trust of their people and be sensitive to their needs and willing to be public advocates for their relief. In other words, he argued that black clergy possess all the elements for good, effective political leadership, e.g., high social respect, excellent rhetorical skills, knowledge of local issues and their relatedness to larger social problems, and good moral character. Further, black clergy have the ear of the community which helps immeasurably in mobilizing volunteers for electioneering purposes.

An important constraint on clergy moving quickly into the arena of electoral politics is the negative moral image that has come to be associated with professional politicians. To date this has not tarnished the character of those black clergy already in public office and that, in itself, should demonstrate that political office does not necessarily lead to moral decline.

Accepting such a charge could lead to improved public debate on matters relative to the common good. Not since the Civil Rights Movement has the public realm been dominated by a substantive debate about societal structures and their impact on the quality of human life. Black church leaders alone have the capacity to initiate and to mobilize widespread public debate on the devastating social problems presently threatening the lives of one-third of its citizens. And this debate must be waged by public policy makers and that implies the necessity of putting in office sufficient numbers of morally qualified people to make the difference.

Thus, an associational theory of society helps to explain in every period the form and rate of social change in America relative to racial liberation and justice. The Black Church Independence Movement institutionalized black America's prophetic tradition and provided basic leadership in each period for the long, arduous struggle which reached a watershed in the Civil War and finally culminated in the Civil Rights legislation of 1964 and 1965. Similarly, the black churches must now become the loci for intensive polit-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

ical activity by deploying their institutional resources to the task of electing church leaders to public office since the primary need in our day is the consolidation of the civil rights gains into substantive public policy. The black churches have been America's embodiment of the voluntary principle in the search for racial justice. They alone comprise the leadership potential that must now actualize itself in the domain of public offices.

The Christian Base Communities and the Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda

by RICHARD SHAULL

After many years as pastor and teacher in Brazil, Richard Shaull served as professor of ecumenics at Princeton Seminary from 1962 to 1980. He continues to travel, teach, and do research in Central and South America. Among his recent books is Heralds of a New Reformation: The Poor of South and North America.

MY CALVINIST heritage awakened in me, early on, a passionate concern for and commitment to the church as the instrument of God's redemptive purpose in history. That same heritage also led me to believe that the church, in order to be faithful to this calling, must always be open to renewal and willing to respond time and again, in new ways, to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in new historical situations. I have been proud of the fact that I belong to a church that, since its beginning, has declared itself to be an *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*.

These convictions played an important part in my decision to return to Princeton in 1962. After my return, I was happy to find, in Charles West, a colleague with similar concerns, and greatly appreciated the opportunity we had to work together for a number of years in courses on the mission of the church in the modern world. I was encouraged not only by the response of students to these issues but also by the possibilities I saw for the renewal of mainline Protestant churches in the USA.

In recent years, however, I have come to the conclusion that these churches, by and large, hold out few prospects for the radical renewal called for at this time. In fact, precisely when the changing human situation calls for new and creative responses, they seem to be turning their backs on these challenges, dedicating more and more of their energies to the struggle for self-preservation. In various denominations, small but well-organized groups energetically defend patterns of church life and mission from the past, while those in positions of leadership, who once encouraged and created space for new ventures in mission, seem more and more reluctant to do so.

Upon returning to Latin America after an absence of nearly two decades, I was thus quite surprised by what I found there. What I had most hoped for but failed to see in the United States was happening: the re-formation, or as some there would call it, the "re-invention" of the church. But it was not taking place among the historical Protestant churches, but rather in Ro-

man Catholic circles; it was occurring not as the result of the initiative and struggle of distinguished church leaders and scholars, but among poor and marginal people and those living in solidarity with them in the Christian Base Communities.

The church as described in the New Testament was a "happening." The poorest people were sharing the little they had and learning how to work together to transform their world in the direction of the reign of God. Those considered powerless were struggling courageously in the face of overwhelming destructive power, as they willingly offered their lives in the struggle for justice. Among those denied everything most of us consider indispensable for human life, I found an amazing spirit of joyfulness and of hope. In their midst, I could understand what Saint Paul meant when he spoke of the church as the first-fruits of a New Age.

In the Christian Base Communities, I recognized a new historical manifestation of the *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, of such central importance in our Calvinist heritage. Consequently, I came to the conclusion that it is from the vantage point of this new reformation that we can best understand who we are as heirs of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. In this encounter, the Spirit may lead us to discover how we can recover and incarnate that heritage once again.

As a result of my contacts with a number of CBCs, I'm convinced that we in North America can learn a great deal from them. We cannot import and copy what they have done, but we can get clues from them about essential elements in the re-formation of the church that we should take into account. Here I would like to examine those I consider to be most important.

I. CONNECTING WITH A "NEW HISTORICAL SUBJECT"

Central American and South African Christians speak of a *kairos*. By the use of this word, they call attention to the specific historical situation in which they are living, as a time when "God is passing through," a time of unique opportunity, a moment in which the time is ripe for new initiatives and movements. For them, at the center of this new situation is the emergence of the poor and marginal Third World people as "the new historical subject." The Christian Base Communities in Latin America represent a creative response to this *kairos*.

I share the opinion of many Latin American social scientists and theologians that the emergence of this new historical subject in and through the popular movements is the most important development that has taken place

in the last decade in Central and South America. Everywhere such movements are springing up and growing in strength and importance, primarily among the poorest people: movements of peasants and industrial workers, Indian and Afro-American movements, women's movements, movements of the mothers and wives of the "disappeared," movements for alternative health care and popular education, and small cooperatives for production and distribution. In some places, the entire populace seems to be on the move for life, health, culture, dignity, and freedom.

The victims of exploitation and injustice are not only becoming more aware of what is happening to them but are also perceiving why they are suffering. More than this, they are emerging from their silence and passivity of centuries and are deciding to take into their own hands the struggle to change society. They represent a new social class that is coming to the fore as protagonists in the struggle for liberation.

And in many places, the primary motivating force in all this is Christian faith. As small groups of peasants or residents of slums gathered to study the Bible, they discovered that the biblical story was their story and its language became their language. A new experience of the presence and power of God in their lives gave them a new sense of their worth as human beings and a new experience of community. And as they began to work together to meet some of their most immediate needs, they found themselves energized and organized for action. A profoundly religious people found, in their religious heritage, rich resources enabling them to become subjects, taking responsibility for their life and destiny.

If we look at the history of the church from this vantage point, we can perceive how frequently a new form of church has emerged in response to the needs and aspirations of a new social class. This happened as the newly-organized Lutheran and Reformed Churches connected with the emerging "middle-class" in Europe in the sixteenth century, and as the Wesleyan movement developed among industrial workers and other marginal people in eighteenth-century England. In both instances, those in the forefront of these movements faced the spiritual crisis of their time and found, in the gospel, a message of good news that spoke directly to the needs and aspirations of a new historical subject. They also re-formed the church as this newly-discovered message became incarnate in another cultural world and thus became a dynamic force not only in shaping that culture but also in transforming society. Today, something similar is happening through a New Reformation in Latin America.

II. IN THE BEGINNING: AN INITIATIVE FROM OUTSIDE

The Base Communities are frequently referred to as *the church of the poor*, and rightly so. But I have discovered that the original response to the *kairos* mentioned above, which led to the birth of the CBCs, came not from the poor themselves but from men and women belonging to the more privileged classes, who decided to live and work in solidarity with the poor.

My wife and I lived for several months in Colonia Nicarao, in Managua, and were closely associated with members of the Base Community there. This CBC early on served as an inspiration and model for other CBCs in Nicaragua, from Managua to the island of Solentiname. Its members trace its origin, in the early 1970s, to the arrival of a young Spanish priest who lived in their midst, helped them to look at their situation through eyes of faith, and brought them together in small groups in their homes to study the Bible and reflect on what was happening in their daily lives.

In an extremely poor neighborhood in Canoas, in southern Brazil, I found a dynamic CBC, whose members were working together to bake bread, care for the health of their children, secure basic services for their community from the government, and deal with larger social and political issues. This all began twenty years ago, when a Marist brother decided to leave the school for wealthy children in which he was teaching and move into this neighborhood, a decision which led to his arrest and imprisonment by the military on several occasions.

Across an entire continent several thousand priests, lay brothers and sisters, as well as women and men from diverse professional backgrounds, took this step. And as they moved closer to the poor, they frequently found themselves regarded with suspicion by those in power. Many were arrested or forced to leave when their lives and the lives of those with whom they were working were threatened; a number were killed by death squads and the military.

We have here something similar to what happened in the early stages of the modern missionary enterprise. Those early pioneers saw a world of millions of men, women, and children living and dying without Christ, and felt called to dedicate their lives to carrying the gospel to them. They decided to go to other lands and peoples, with little concern for economic well-being or security for themselves or their families, and even if it meant begging for the money they needed from friends and from interested congregations. It involved entering an unknown and strange world, learning another language and getting to know a culture not their own, in order to

discover how to present the Christian message in that language and culture, and give expression to it in life and community.

The new company of missionary pioneers in Latin America had this same spirit. Their eyes had been opened to the suffering around them. Their conscience had been awakened and they knew that God was calling them to respond. They also knew that they could not wait for the religious institution to which they belonged to recognize this need and set up mission programs in line with this new vision. If their religious order or diocese was ready to send and support them, they rejoiced in that fact. Otherwise, they had no choice but to go ahead on their own. Priests went to live in poor urban or rural neighborhoods, working in the community to support themselves. Small groups of nuns got together to do the same. Often a few young women and men trained as doctors, teachers, or social workers, took a similar step and offered their professional services to their new neighbors.

They knew that the world of the poor was not their world. They did not speak their language or understand their culture. They realized that they could not be content to pass on their own religious language or reproduce the patterns of congregational life developed elsewhere. That would alienate the poor even further from themselves and their own history and culture. It would also increase their sense of inferiority and powerlessness. On this new missionary frontier, missionaries were called upon to enter an unknown world, identify themselves with the suffering and struggle of the poor, listen to them, and learn from them and with them. This meant learning how to honor their culture and their religious faith, helping them to understand better their own world and name it, discover their own ability to think and to act, and thus participate in a creative process out of which a new language of faith and new forms of community life might emerge.

Living and working in this way, the early missionaries set in motion a process which is often being carried forward by the poor themselves. On a recent visit to Nicaragua, I met with a number of grass-roots CBC leaders from isolated rural areas, most of them with little formal education, who are products of this early work and continue it in other communities. I was amazed to discover the contribution they were making, which went far beyond anything an outsider from another culture and class could do: their ability to relate to the poorest rural folk, to help them understand their situation and discover what they might do to change it; their capacity to draw on the rich language and imagery of their culture to speak of their faith, and the depth of their understanding of the gospel.

III. BECOMING A COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

In our traditional work of evangelism, we have tended to pull people away from the immediacy of family and community as well as the struggle with daily problems, into a church sanctuary. There, we present a "spiritual" message which may have little or no direct relationship to the overwhelming problems of suffering people.

The Christian Base Communities have adopted an approach which turns this all around. Those responsible for organizing them go directly to the people *where they live their daily lives*, bringing them together in homes, or under a tree in rural areas, or in any available community building. There those who gather focus attention on their immediate problems, learn to speak of them with each other, and explore what the Bible has to say about them.

Some groups begin their meetings with Bible study, seeking to discover what guidance it may offer them for dealing with these concrete problems. In others, those present begin by talking with each other about the things that have happened to them in the past week, striving to understand them and deal with them in the light of what the Bible has to say.

With both approaches, the important thing is that the cultivation of the spiritual life is set in the context of the daily struggle of the poor to get enough food to eat, to find ways of caring for their small children while working, to improve the conditions of the shacks in which they live, to improve relations in the family, to rehabilitate young people on drugs, or to deal with violence in their neighborhood. And each of these problems is dealt with in light of the Word of God. As one member of a Base Community in a *favela* in Sao Paulo put it, "a base ecclesial community is a group of people who reflect on the Word of God as a family. They discover together the needs of their street, their neighborhood, and their people, and use the Word of God as a mirror in which to see their situation."

With time, these informal groups often become vital faith communities because their members discover that God is present precisely in the midst of all this. They speak of God as being very close to them, of God "passing through their street" and "gracing" their lives. And those who share in their life together often sense this presence of God among them in a compelling way. Here are people who are struggling with overwhelming problems with an amazing spirit of hopefulness and often of joyfulness. Women and men who have nothing seem willing to share everything, take on impossible tasks and get surprising results, and face persecution and death threats without fear.

The CBCs expose the spiritual bankruptcy of those who seek to find God in a "spiritual" realm far removed from the human struggle in which the God of the Bible is present. They challenge us to enter into the mystery of the divine as we open our eyes and tune our ears to the moving of the Spirit in the midst of the struggle for authentic life as the world is transformed. They also suggest to us that grace abounds in the hells of this earth, that the Spirit of God is present most dynamically where men, women, and children are dying because of exploitation and injustice, that Christ is to be found in the midst of those who dare to share his suffering and run the risks of crucifixion.

Moreover, the fact that this new experience of the presence of God has come to us as a gift from the poorest and most marginal people, those considered to be of little worth, may indicate that we can hope to enter this realm of the Spirit only as we live in solidarity with them and make their struggle our own as well. When I immerse myself in the life of a vital Base Community, it provides me with a vantage point from which to look more critically at much that goes on in many of our churches. I see more clearly the barrenness of any type of evangelism that disassociates the spiritual quest from the hard realities of daily life. I realize how much money we waste maintaining large church buildings which contribute little or nothing to the development of faith communities in neighborhoods, and how much time and energy we spend on church programs which could be used to bring people together in community. And I realize that even our sincere efforts to break out of this by starting Bible study groups in homes or even forming "house churches" can fail because they focus primarily on the individual "spiritual" journey rather than on the discovery of God's grace in the midst of life in the world.

IV. HONORING THE RELIGIOUS WORLD OF THE PEOPLE

As the members of the CBCs met God at the heart of their struggle for life in their local communities, something else happened. The God who related to them where they were also provided them, through the Scriptures, with a means by which *they could articulate their own faith and speak their own word*. This represents another major break with our traditional approach to evangelism and Christian education.

When I graduated from seminary, and especially after I had completed my doctoral studies in theology, I felt certain that the theological concepts I had learned, and which served so well to orient my thought and life, could mean the same thing to others. Gradually, I was forced to see that this was not the case. In Brazil, university students eventually succeeded in showing

me that my theological categories did not help them to name their world; some years later, women students at Princeton Seminary helped me to see that they could not use my theological concepts to express their faith. More recently, teaching courses in theology for lay people in local churches, I have been forced to realize that, while they are struggling to put their world together in a meaningful way, each must find his/her own way of doing so. If I convince them to accept and use my theological language, I may draw them away from their own resources for thought, or lead them to believe that they are really incapable of thinking creatively.

When the poor in Latin America began to read the Bible in the CBCs, many of them for the first time, they were amazed to discover that many of the people figuring in the biblical story were people like themselves: poor and oppressed women, fisherpersons and peasants, people living in exile, lepers, and other outcasts. They came to see that the biblical story was their story, the struggle there described, their struggle. And as they spoke with each other about what they read in the Bible, they found themselves speaking articulately and authentically about their own situation, and thus finding their own word. In fact, since their struggle was so similar to that described in many parts of the Bible, they often arrived at a depth of understanding of it that others of us, including biblical scholars, have failed to achieve.

As pastoral agents working with the CBCs encouraged their members in this type of reflection, something else happened. They became more aware of the religious imagery and symbols which were so much a part of their own history and culture, paid more attention to them, and began to reflect on them in dialogue with the Bible. Out of this has come new confessions of faith, new liturgies, a number of Masses expressing the religious faith and experience of peasants, the poor, and indigenous people, as well as new developments in theological reflection which are affecting the thought of professional theologians.

V. LIVING IN A CARING, SHARING, EMPOWERING COMMUNITY

In the Christian Base Communities, those who have no place in our modern society are beginning to live a new quality of life in community. Those who have nothing are showing us what can happen when we share our material possessions. As they read the Bible in their small communities and feel compelled to live by the Word, they realize that they are called to share the very little they have with others engaged in the same desperate struggle for life. This may mean sharing their last kilo of rice with a mother whose

children have not had anything at all to eat, or welcoming a homeless family into their one-room shack.

A community of Salvadoran refugees who lived for a number of years in Honduras have recently returned to their country and settled in a region completely destroyed by the war. They have organized themselves to work together to create a new life for themselves. The first houses they build are for the widows with small children, the sick and the disabled. And the food they grow is shared with all on the basis of need.

As those who have always struggled alone, convinced that there was no other way to survive, learn to share in this way, they are often surprised to experience God's closeness as they share. As one theologian has put it, the God who is manifest only in love breathes on people who have learned how to share. Living by the love in which God is present, they bring down grace upon themselves and their community and thus learn how to share more, love more, and live for others.

This extraordinary willingness to share is not to be found everywhere in the CBCs and there is no guarantee that this revolutionary breakthrough will be sustained indefinitely. But whatever happens in the future, the CBCs witness to the power of the gospel to shape life in community. They point to a quality of life that is radically different from what we usually experience in the church. They call into question the individualism of our middle-class way of life, in which we strive to be self-sufficient and dedicate our time and energy to the pursuit of our personal goals of material enrichment and professional advancement. And they expose the spiritual bankruptcy of our congregational life where we refuse even to deal with these issues.

At a time when the passion for acquisition of more and more consumer goods seems to be captivating people of all classes around the world, the CBCs remind us that there is another way, help to keep alive the hope that human beings can find a richer life as they learn to share with each other, and demonstrate the power of Christian faith to transform our common life.

The members of the CBCs have discovered another dimension of the *koinona* of the Holy Spirit. Those who have learned to share their material possessions have also found that they can live and work together in such a way that they *raise up and empower each other*. As they do this, those who had no place in society discover their own worth. Those who were convinced that they could do nothing recognize that they can think and act and develop their talents. And those who were powerless take responsibility to work with others to try to solve some of their immediate problems and change their world.

In a society structured hierarchically, in which a few have power over the vast majority and everyone strives for such power at the expense of others, this is indeed revolutionary. Those who have been powerless are calling for a fundamental re-structuring of power throughout society and are becoming a subversive force in it. And in a church also structured hierarchically, the CBCs represent a new model of community life in the Body of Christ which calls for a re-formation of both Catholic and Protestant churches today as radical as that coming out of the Reformation initiated by Luther and Calvin in the sixteenth century.

How did this happen? From the beginning, priests as well as lay women and men who moved toward the poor were very much influenced by the pedagogical approach articulated by Paulo Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Rather than giving something to the poor or doing something for them, they were determined to help them discover their own potential, create space for them to emerge as subjects, and thus to be empowered and empower each other. And as persons moving in this direction gathered around the Bible, they began to discover what the apostle Paul had to say about the *charismata*, the gifts of the Spirit present in each community for the building up of the Body.

Gradually, it became clear that a CBC could function well only as its members took responsibility for a wide variety of tasks. People were needed who would take the initiative in working with others to prepare the liturgy, direct Bible study, engage in evangelism, care for the most urgent needs of the sick and those in trouble, organize people to work toward the solution of urgent community problems, and discover how to act politically. And one or more persons were needed to coordinate these various activities. It also became clear that members of each CBC had the *charismata* needed for these ministries, and that the community had the responsibility of recognizing those who had these various "gifts."

Out of this experience, new patterns of ministry are developing. Ministries are arising from below, as the community decides what specific tasks need to be undertaken and chooses those who should carry them out for a limited period of time. A few natural leaders often emerge and are given opportunities for further training, but they are encouraged to serve the community and help to train others rather than control and dominate it. One or more persons from outside—a priest, a nun, a pastoral agent—may play an important role in the organization and development of the community. But his/her role is that of helping its members take full responsibility for all aspects of its life.

While the CBCs are committed to the development of this new vision of ministry, they often fall short of their goal. The men and women chosen for specific ministries may fail to carry them out. After a few years, people in the Base Communities fall victims of routine, just as in any other organization. And those who emerge as leaders are not immune to the temptations of power. At the same time, the CBCs have been structured in such a way that their members are challenged to take responsibility. People are energized and are learning how to empower each other, and are discovering that they can work together to solve some formidable problems. In many instances, their vitality witnesses to the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit creating a new model of church more in line with the New Testament witness.

Moreover, as a result of this reality, the church is becoming, once again, the first-fruits of a new order. As a wide range of popular movements develop, inspired in many places by the CBCs, new patterns of social organization are emerging which move in the direction of economic self-reliance and participatory democracy, and offer an exciting possibility for radical social transformation by nonviolent means. As this happens, the CBCs and the popular movements are rightly seen as the major threat to the established order of privilege and exploitation and are often singled out for brutal repression. At the same time, Marxist parties and revolutionary movements are being challenged to look critically at their structures and undertake the type of restructuring by which power will flow from the bottom up more than from the top down.

VI. COMPELLED BY THE GOSPEL TO STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION

Critics of the CBCs often claim that they are more oriented toward political action than toward spiritual growth, that they have reduced the gospel to politics. On the basis of my experience, I'm convinced that this completely distorts the picture. In fact, I would claim that we cannot understand them unless we recognize that their orientation and motivation is fundamentally religious. Emphasizing this point, Cardinal Arns of San Paulo, Brazil, once remarked that if the priests in his diocese tried to bring the poor people together to discuss politics, they would never come back a second time.

The poor people in both rural and urban areas were attracted to the CBCs because of their religious concerns. Most of the Communities I have visited began as small Bible study groups. In them, people got more in touch with the religious traditions and symbols so central in their lives, which were revitalized and transformed through their study of the Bible. Out of this

came a new experience of the presence of God and of the power of Christ to transform their lives.

But, as we have pointed out earlier, at the heart of this *spiritual* experience was the discovery of the presence and power of the divine *in the midst of their daily life in family and neighborhood and in their struggle for survival*. As a result of this basic experience of the gospel, the members of the CBCs were able to grasp what the Bible has to say about the nature of God's redemptive action in history. As their perception was not distorted by an ideology separating the personal and the social, the spiritual and the material, they realized that God's salvific action has to do with the fullness of human life as it is lived in the world.

Consequently, their faith turned their attention toward the world around them; and the more vital and profound their faith, the stronger their compulsion to express it in their daily life in society. Moreover, standing where they stood as poor and marginal people, they were able to grasp something else at the heart of the gospel: discipleship calls for commitment to the struggle to change the world. The poor, according to Jesus, are blessed because they cannot tolerate the unjust present and keep alive the hope for its transformation. Thus, their witness may help us as Calvinists to recover something of Calvin's passion for the transformation of all realms of society in line with the Word of God.

The poor in the Base Communities, starting out from this spiritual experience, have much in common with "born-again" Christians. But as a result of their discovery of the nature of God's redemptive action, their spiritual pilgrimage moves in a different direction, as has been pointed out by a number of recent sociological studies of the CBCs. According to these studies, the CBCs tend to follow a certain process of development in their attempts to live out their faith. Their members begin by discovering that, in community, they can work together to solve some of their most immediate problems. Working mothers can take turns caring for small children of the community, rather than leaving them untended or locking them in their houses when they go to work. By joining together to bake bread or set up a soup kitchen, their families will have more to eat. Working together, they can improve the shacks in which they live and deal with some of their most basic health problems.

Before long, however, members of a faith-motivated community decide that they must do something to get titles to the land on which they live, try to have electricity and running water installed in their neighborhood, and get the local government to open schools and provide some sort of health

care. These goals can be achieved only if they are organized to present their needs to the government and bring pressure on it. And when these small efforts meet strong if not violent opposition on the part of those in power, members of the CBCs begin to raise questions about the structures of power under which they live, and become interested in social analysis. This often leads them to join a variety of popular movements, including labor unions, in order to work for more fundamental structural change.

Spiritual rebirth, grounded in biblical faith, leads to this type of social and political involvement. Precisely because it is grounded in faith and sustained by a faith community, their witness is so strong. At the same time, these struggles are so demanding that some of those caught up in them may no longer give the attention they once did to the spiritual life of the CBC. If the church authorities not only cut off their support of these Communities but also try to isolate them from the rest of the church, this is more likely to happen.

In this situation, the future development of the CBCs will definitely be affected by the presence or absence of evangelical Protestants. For Protestantism in Latin America, especially through the Pentecostal movements, continues to grow because of the central importance it gives to a personal experience of Christ and because of its sensitivity to the deep spiritual longing of those who are suffering the worst deprivation. As these churches made up of poor people pay more attention to what the Bible has to say about God's concern for the poor, and relate more closely to the poor in the CBCs, as is already happening in some places, Catholics and Protestants may help each other find the resources they need for their renewal in a new ecumenical era.

In these pages, I have tried to show that the Christian Base Communities, with all of their limitations, are a contemporary expressions of an *ecclesia semper reformanda*. As such, they present a tremendous challenge to any Reformed Church to recover and live its heritage. Moreover, I believe that the CBCs can help us to understand what this means by identifying issues with which we must struggle and by demonstrating that nothing short of re-creation or re-invention will suffice. The question before us is whether our Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, so at home in the dominant middle-class culture and so structured for self-preservation, can find ways to move toward this goal.

Radical Faith and Social Liberation of the “Little People” in the Americas¹

by GEFFREY B. KELLY

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IN THE SUMMER of 1989, one of my students, an Irish missionary in Africa, told me how moved he had been by a line in John Steinbeck's *The Moon Is Down*.² That particular line became for him a message of reassurance: “The little people won't go under.” These words had surprisingly buoyed him up amidst all the chaos he had encountered in looking out for and defending the so-called “little people” with whom he had been laboring both in Latin America and in South Africa.

Steinbeck's story is itself set in a Nazi-occupied Scandinavian country, probably Norway. There, the searing hatred of the people for their conquerors is something the German Commandant, Colonel Lanser, cannot cope with; he wants to be respected and appreciated. But he has also sized up the situation well. Throughout the widely-flung Nazi empire of occupied countries the Germans are so despised that the force of this hatred and the resistance it engenders among the people will eventually destroy them. In one memorable line, Steinbeck has an officer, Lieutenant Tonder, a romantic poet in peacetime, liken the advance of Nazism by the sheer force of numbers of soldiers and their blitzkrieg mobility to flies apparently conquering the flypaper because they succeed in nearly covering it. But there they die.

In like manner, as we sense from the steely resistance of the people, this particular ideology, imposed by force, and fired by a leader's narcissistic dreams of conquest and a whole people's willingness to be seduced by patriotic slogans and impressive flag-waving ceremonies, is ill-fated. The soldiers themselves begin to realize that they can never break down the icy resistance of the conquered people. Neither harsh measures nor threats of reprisals nor even actual executions of hostages taken from among the most

¹ This essay, adapted from a public lecture I gave at St. Norbert's College in 1988 as part of the Killeen Chair Series exploring the theme, “Being Christian in a Revolutionary Time,” is dedicated to Professor Charles C. West on the occasion of his retirement from active teaching at Princeton Theological Seminary. Charles has not only been an inspiration in my Bonhoeffer studies; he has also been an example of the radical faith of which I speak and a champion of the “little people” on behalf of whom I am writing here.

² John Steinbeck, *The Moon Is Down* (New York: The Viking Press, 1942), p. 176.

important people of the town can deter the "little people" from preserving their dignity and freedom by thwarting the oppressor in any way they can. The Nazis only *appear* to have conquered, but they are really like flies who have merely taken over the territory of the flypaper. They will die, stuck in their dreams of national glory and their stratagems of terror. The people will continue to resist.

In many ways, Steinbeck's story of the clash of wills between the German commandant and the Norwegian mayor is a parable of how so often in this century the representatives of political or economic ideologies and people from nearly all ranks of society have entered into open conflict over the issues of freedom, dignity, peace, and even survival itself. In some underdeveloped countries, especially in pockets of destitution in the Americas, it does, indeed, seem like the "little people" are in danger of going under. Mayor Orden in Steinbeck's story is at first cordial to the conquerors who have the power to make life miserable for his people. Whether terror is unleashed will depend on his obedience to the Colonel and his acting as a buffer between the enemy and his people. The mayor wants to preserve the peace and tries to be cooperative, but soon the people's own desires to be free and the ever-escalating, malignant cruelty of the soldiers turn him into a fearless leader of the resistance movement.

There is, I would argue, a similar kind of changeover taking place in many of today's churches, even those which once supported accommodation with political, military, and economic power bases in the name of preserving peace and sustaining their own institutional interests. No longer can the churches be counted on to provide the social narcotic capable of drugging oppressed peoples into compliance with systemic evil. These churches have more often of late unflinchingly taken up the cause of the "little people" who have become victims of oppression by powerful, militaristic dictators and greedy, heartless oligarchies. Many churches have, in fact, become vociferous champions of these "little people," and seem determined that, in the words of Steinbeck, they "won't go under." When, for example, death squads roam freely in Central American villages to terrorize crop-picking peasants into silence and acceptance of their degrading conditions, church leaders are often the target. It puzzles observers from more comfort-laced societies that these seemingly powerless people will not cease their determination to have a better life for themselves and their children. Death squads kill the prophets who dare criticize the policies of the powerful as well as any suspected voice of discontent, including those whose "crime" is only sympathy for the cause of the poor. Nonetheless, the "little people"

continue on and other leaders emerge. The "little people" won't go under. And now many of the mainstream churches, even those considered by the poorer classes to have been in the pockets of the affluent and of military elites, are slowly taking up the cause of justice for and liberation of the oppressed.

I. DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S CRITIQUE OF THE CHURCHES

Such courage on the part of the churches has not always been the case in the struggle for justice. There has been only a very late awakening in the churches in the matter of their present compassion for, solidarity with, and forceful speaking out on behalf of today's victims of callous oppression. Disturbing studies like Gordon Zahn's *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars*,³ for example, have well documented the acquiescence, even the encouragement of German and Austrian Bishops in the Nazi conquest of Europe. The anti-Hitler resistance movement within Germany, on the other hand, was unhinged from church support. In fact, when the July 20th plot against Hitler failed, the churches again rallied around the flag and offered prayers of thanksgiving for the deliverance of their beloved Führer from this attempt on his life.

It was this unholy alliance of pulpit and politics that had so disturbed the young Lutheran pastor and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his own opposition to the Hitlerism then threatening the world. Bonhoeffer was angered by the church's unquestioning, inverted patriotism. Long before recent presidential campaigns in the United States, the Nazis had learned the value of flag waving and patriotic slogans and of the disinformation that could portray peace-loving, good citizens like the Jews as enemies of the people. But, for Bonhoeffer, the church's support of Hitler's law and order at home and nationalistic expansion by bloody conquest abroad—sometimes construed in the churches as an anti-communist crusade—made the church an accomplice in the demonic destruction then being unleashed upon Europe.

That is why in one of the most poignant passages of his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer asserted that the church's silence made it "guilty of the decline in responsible action, in bravery in the defense of a cause, and in willingness to suffer for what is known to be right." The church's desire not to get involved in the messy treasonous acts of resistance led it, Bonhoeffer complained, merely to stand "by while violence and wrong were being committed under cover of

³ Gordon C. Zahn, *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962), pp. 60-83.

[the name of] Christ.”⁴ Bonhoeffer had not missed the way Nazism had coopted the churches into helping shape the image of Hitler to the people as the German messiah for a better, more Aryan earth. In Nazi “catechisms” Hitler became a Christ figure who would do for the nation and the land what Jesus had done for their souls, or so it was claimed. One noted church representative had, in fact, declared: “It is because of Hitler that Christ, God the helper and redeemer, has become effective among us. Therefore, National Socialism is positive Christianity in action. . . . Hitler is the way of the Spirit and the will of God for the German people to enter the church of Christ. With the courage of Luther, we German Christians strive now to build the church with the ancient tested stones (Bible and Creed) and with the new stones (Race and People).”⁵

But Bonhoeffer, cutting through the political and ecclesiastical piffle, demanded instead that the churches confess they had “witnessed the lawless application of brutal force, the physical and spiritual suffering of countless innocent people, oppression, hatred and murder, and [had not raised their] voice on behalf of the victims and had not found ways to hasten to their aid.” His poignant accusation against the churches reached a crescendo in that same section of his *Ethics* when he declared that the church was “guilty of the deaths of the weakest and most defenseless brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.”⁶ This was Bonhoeffer’s cryptic way of referring to the Jews and dissenting pastors of Nazi Germany. What is remarkable about this “Confession of Guilt” was that Bonhoeffer wrote it, not during the chaos of the defeat of the Nazi armies, which is what people first thought when they read this posthumous book, but at the height of the Nazi military success, Germany’s greatest victory, the fall of France. While the German people were waving their flags, singing their patriotic songs, and dancing in the streets hailing the achievements of their fearless Führer, and church bells were gonging over the crowds, Bonhoeffer was privately lamenting the church’s guilt in the sufferings and deaths then being inflicted on the innocent, all because of political, nationalistic, and racist ideology.

About eight months before his execution in the Nazi death camp of Flossenbürg, Bonhoeffer composed a “Stocktaking of Christianity.” This was an outline for a book on the church he never lived to complete. Paradoxically, this short outline has had an influence far out of proportion to its brevity,

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 114–115.

⁵ Cited in E. H. Robertson, *Christians Against Hitler* (London: SCM Press, 1962), pp. 25–26.

⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 114 (translation altered to allow for inclusive language).

undoubtedly because of the heroic death of its author. In it Bonhoeffer saw the church standing up only for the church's cause and survival but not for that of the people; this was because, in his opinion, the church had "little personal faith in Christ."⁷ It had become a defensive church lacking heart to take Christ-like risks for others and committed to political accommodation for the sake of preserving its own clerical privileges and insuring survival as a church. For him the only real issue for the church was whether or not it would speak up for those who had become the hated and oppressed classes: the Jews, the peacemakers, and those daring to dissent who were being processed for annihilation in the death camps. The church, he saw only too clearly, had unfortunately become a stagnant pond of general resolutions, lauding good citizenship and the war effort, stressing pious programs that were safely removed from political controversy, and offering "prayerful," sacramental solace uninvolved in the real problems of coping with systemic injustice. This is what the church did best, but in those murderous days Bonhoeffer felt it was only a conscience-saving cover for its feckless complicity in the war and in the Nazi reign of terror at home and abroad.

One of the problems Bonhoeffer faced was how to arouse the church from its political quietism and to stir up its outrage at the abuses of human rights beyond the more self-serving view of defending only the church's limited interests. For Bonhoeffer, abuses of human rights anywhere had to be the church's concern, whether the victim be a Christian or not, a German or not. Bonhoeffer had, indeed, challenged the churches early on in the Hitler regime to recognize that Jesus Christ encounters us in human needs and pleads for our help in the persons of those who are not of one's nation or of one's race. These were his words delivered at the ecumenical conference in Gland, Switzerland, in 1932.⁸ They were to be echoed in an essay that he wrote to his family and fellow conspirators shortly before his arrest. "We are not Christ, but if we want to be Christian, we must have some share in Christ's large-heartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes, and by showing a real sympathy that springs, not from fear, but from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer. Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behavior. The Christian is called to sympathy and action . . . by the sufferings for his brothers and sisters for whose sake Christ suffered."⁹

⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 381 (hereafter LPP).

⁸ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1928-1936*, ed. by Edwin H. Robertson (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 185.

⁹ "After Ten Years," LPP, p. 14.

There is no doubt that Bonhoeffer's decision to join the conspirators in opposition to the corrupt and terroristic Nazi government was an effort on his part to conform to the example of Jesus Christ. His willingness to suffer and to die for others in that struggle for freedom from what he perceived to be an anti-Christian and inhuman tyranny became the ultimate test of his faith. Bonhoeffer's opposition to Hitler was motivated by his desire to follow Christ and by a keen sense that the church should be where Christ would be: among the outcast victims of nationalist malevolence and an unjust war. As he put it in his prison letters, "the church should be like Christ existing solely to be of service for others."¹⁰ For Bonhoeffer, the issue was Christ's challenge to the radical faith of the cross. In that same outline for a book on the church, he describes what he believes to be the real question of faith. It is not the question of what *must* I believe, he declares. That would seem to reduce faith to that alone which is of stated obligation. Nor is it a question of what *can* I believe, as if faith were merely a belief system based on what my intellect with the aid of catechisms and clear teaching can assent to. No; faith, Bonhoeffer concluded, was an answer to the question: "What do we really believe? I mean, believe in such a way that we stake our lives on it."¹¹ He gave his personal answer to that question by becoming a pacifist in the 1930s; by being a critic of his church and government to the point of arousing the Gestapo to forbid him to preach, teach, write, or publish; by joining the anti-Hitler conspiracy; and, finally, by his lonely martyrdom on the scaffold of Flossenbürg.

II. LACK OF FREEDOM IN THE CIVIL RELIGION OF AMERICAN CHURCHES

Americans rightly take pride in what the United States did to defeat the Nazi armies and to liberate the captive nations and the inmates of the concentration camps during World War II. Some Americans have, in fact, turned Bonhoeffer into a folk hero they can identify with, knowing that their cause was the same during that turbulent period of 20th century history. Yet Bonhoeffer himself was diffident about the boast of America that it was the land of the free. A page from his 1939 diary indicates that Bonhoeffer considered the churches of America mired in the same self-serving religiosity he had denounced in Germany as unchristian and escapist. In that diary entry he bemoaned the fact that a worship service he had attended in a very prominent Riverside church in New York was merely "a respectable, self-indulgent, self-satisfied religious celebration. This sort of idolatrous religion," he wrote, "stirs up the flesh which is accustomed to being kept in

¹⁰ *LPP*, p. 382.

¹¹ *LPP*, p. 382.

check by the Word of God. Such sermons make for libertinism, egotism, indifference. . . . Perhaps Anglo-Saxons are really more religious than we are, but they are certainly not more Christian, at least, if they still permit sermons like that."¹²

Not long after that Sunday in June of 1939, he jotted down in his diary that Americans speak "much about freedom in their sermons. Freedom as a possession is a doubtful thing for a church; freedom must be won under the compulsion of necessity. Freedom for the church comes from the necessity of the word of God. Otherwise it becomes arbitrariness and ends in a great many new ties. Whether the church in America is really 'free,' I doubt it."¹³ Bonhoeffer's doubt here might have been compounded were he able to peer into the future and to see that some of the very things in the American way of being loyal, patriotic citizens and religious people would make Americans as prone to nationalistic seduction as the Germans were in the era of Adolf Hitler. For him, a church that prizes fidelity to the nation above the demands of the gospel is a church enchained to an idol. Yet such loyalty linked to love of country soon became the trademark of the good citizen well beyond World War II and is particularly evident today in the public's uncritical reaction to the United States' bullying, belligerent policies in Central America. Those who publicly disagree with United States militarism over the last several years have often been branded as soft on communism or left-leaning or as simply un-American. Capitalizing on the right wing of a seeming majority of American citizens, managers of political campaigns are careful to drape their candidates in the American flag and to make an issue of the constitutional right to bear arms or the sacredness of the American flag and any foreign policy declared a guaranteed warranty for national security.

These same managers are adept at playing on the ideological bent of preachers who in turn often rally behind what is nothing more than a civil religion in which the distinctions between serving God and serving the nation are blurred. In the past this has made morally feasible the unwaveringly obedient but blatantly immoral actions of SS commandos on the prowl for Jews. More immediately, the fudging of moral sensitivity in such a civil religion offers justification for the destructive bombing of defenseless villages, or even the brutal, stealthy assassinations of peasants and religious

¹² Bonhoeffer, *Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1935-1939*, ed. by Edwin H. Robertson (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 230-231.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 240-241.

people by right-wing death squads roaming freely in supposed Christian countries.

Some of these countries have even been baptized democracies through the Orwellian double-speak of the United States Department of State. National security is invoked as a binding symbol of the prosperity and protection from which all freedom-loving Americans can benefit through a foreign policy in which the supposed evil of guerrilla warfare or militant Marxism is kept at bay. Power, toughness on less worthy citizens, and coercion are then perceived as more effective in achieving one's ends than the gospel teachings of love, compassion, and forbearance. Symbols must accordingly be twisted so God becomes more Avenging Judge than Father, the cross becomes a swastika, and a nuclear submarine can be christened the "Body of Christ" by the ministers of military preparedness.

If all this sounds like "civil religion," to borrow a phrase made popular by Robert Bellah in 1966, we should keep in mind that, with Bellah, American "civil religion" does not conjure up the viler images of the American way of life made into a quasi-religion or of the idolatry of national security.¹⁴ Nor does it mean to him a worship of the nation through acts of patriotic homage or in symbols like the flag and an absolutized pledge of blind allegiance. In fact, Bellah describes this "civil religion" as the subordination of the nation to ethical principles that transcend it and in terms of which it should be judged.¹⁵ It was religious self-understanding through which the universal, transcendent religious reality could be refracted. Bellah lists biblical archetypes such as Exodus, Promised Land, and chosen people to explain the passionate espousal of the view that American society should be in accord with God's will and thereby become "a light to all the nations." He praises the uniqueness of the American nation and seems to plead that America "not succumb to the arrogance of power 'which has afflicted, weakened, and in some cases destroyed great nations in the past.'"¹⁶ By 1975, however, after the experiences of the late 60s and early 70s, Bellah was writing of the "broken covenant" with a sense that the nation had tragically betrayed its calling in the divine plan.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 180.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁶ Marie Augusta Neal, "Civil Religion, Theology, and Politics in America," in Thomas M. McFadden, ed., *America in Theological Perspective* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), pp. 101-102.

¹⁷ Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

III. THE CHALLENGE OF PROPHETIC RELIGION IN COMPASSION FOR THE POOR

It is this sense of betrayal that has led a minority of our nation's people to reach out to the prophetic in religion and to causes of liberation as their bonding to society is eroded by the corrosive inequities they must face daily. These are the marginalized people who have lost faith in the American system of government, who cannot boast of prosperity with the flag-wavers and who cannot pledge with hand over heart that this nation has either liberty or justice for all, much less that is one nation under God. These belong to that other America which has more of a solidarity with the barrios of Brazil or the black ghettos of South Africa. These poor and powerless people have come to know with increasing indignation and bitterness that their needs and rights have been defined for them by the affluent power brokers who look on them as more of a nuisance and tax burden and by politicians with neither class nor religious links to them and with little appreciation of what it means to be poor in America.

The challenge to religious faith posed by the presence of the massive "underclass" of people seemingly stuck in incredible poverty, dismal living conditions, and even homelessness, is an awesome one indeed. Yet it is a challenge that can be linked with one of the most inspiring and daring of biblical declarations: God's word to Moses, "I have heard the cry of my people" (Ex. 3:7). In one of the most dramatic moments of the Bible we are told that this God is one who cares for those who suffer, for the slaves, the poor, the oppressed; in a word, for the "little people." To Moses and to countless generations of those otherwise without hope, he speaks these words: "I know their suffering and I have come to deliver them" (Ex. 3:7-8).

How God fulfills that pledge is the story of Moses' radical faith in the word that is always as much a promise as it is a call to become God's liberating force in this world. This was a point not missed by the Catholic Bishops of Brazil's vast northeastern region, a land teeming with poverty, exploitation, and violence. "Following in the steps of Moses," they have declared,

we want to fulfill, together with the people of God, our mission as pastors and prophets. We were summoned to speak by the Word of God, which judges the events of history. In this way we have tried to understand the cry of our people, the daily facts and events of suffering. . . . Before the suffering of our people, humble and oppressed for centuries, we feel called by the Word of God to take a position, a clear

position on the side of the poor, a position taken in common with all those who commit themselves to people for their true liberation.¹⁸

The struggle to which these Bishops committed themselves continues today as the Bishops challenge the systemic poverty that has spawned homelessness, exploitation, and the secretive, terroristic "death squads" who target those who champion the poor.

In a way the poor who are the concern of these Bishops and the Bishops themselves have become what a contemporary prophet, Jean Vanier, calls "barometer people."¹⁹ They are those who won't allow us the peace of mind of our non-involvement when victims of injustice cry out for our help. Vanier is the founder of the worldwide L'Arche communities in which Christians share their day-to-day life with mentally handicapped adults. He sees in these retarded men and women with whom he lives and works not the discards and worthless outcasts of a throwaway society but the very manifestation of what he believes to be the gospel's secret: that God is not a God who wants us to be hurt but a God who wishes to inspire us with joy in meeting Jesus in the poorest, weakest, and most broken members of our society. Vanier tells us how these handicapped people, destined always to remain at the level of the hurt child, have taught him so much about the mystery of God and the real presence of Jesus, and, inevitably, what Jesus meant when he declared that we must become like little children if we would enter his kingdom. The child exudes trust. These handicapped adults become the "barometer" of one's own trust and love. In the words of Vanier: "It is easier to live with Jesus locked up inside the tabernacle, safely controlled. But it is painful to confront a living Jesus." This is a Jesus who asks if we really care about him and who "doesn't allow us to be tired, to be preoccupied with our own barriers, to hide from the call to love."²⁰

But such is the nexus of a radical faith, namely, that a living Jesus confronts us asking us to form a covenant relationship with those who are the "little people" with whom he has identified. We are challenged to dismantle the barriers against our inconvenience and insecurity, to see beyond our immediate concerns the world where the blind beg sight, the deaf long for the sounds of music, the lame would walk again, and the poor hunger for the good news that they too are "God's people." Christians are called to be

¹⁸ Catholic Bishops N.E. of Brazil, *I Have Heard the Cry of My People* (New York: IDOC North America, Summer 1973), cited in Esther and Mortimer Arias, *The Cry of My People* (New York: Friendship Press, Inc., 1980), pp. ix-x.

¹⁹ Jean Vanier, "The Secret of the Gospel," *The Other Side*, March 1986, p. 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

that good news. They are not called to lose themselves in the satisfaction of their own religious performances. Isn't that the gist of Isaiah 58:6, where the prophet says that the only fast which pleases God is "to loosen the bonds of wickedness and to liberate captives"?

To borrow Vanier's expression, there are many captive people in the Americas who are "barometers" of the strength or fickleness of one's confession of faith. A total of 32.5 million people in the United States are now living below the poverty level; 5 million of these are children under the age of six. There are millions of homeless people—300,000 in New York alone—who fill the streets of America's inner cities, the lucky ones able to find heat in winter squatting on steam grates, while the Federal Government, though able to find billions of dollars to sustain the overkill capacity of so-called military preparedness, has cut funds for low-cost housing by two-thirds. The peace and prosperity boasts of political campaigns fly in the face of a systematic dismantling or weakening of programs that provide health care, income support, and job training for the poorest segments of our population. The "barometer people" are everywhere. And they speak to the faith of the people and churches of America.

It is because they refused to give in to the hopelessness of powerful but heartless elements of their societies that Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King can likewise be considered "barometer people" of the radical faith that is a liberating force for the oppressed. According to Bonhoeffer, the choice of death over life had been made by his fellow Christians in their idolatrous pursuit of what is called the "cheap grace" of an easy Christianity. This was a Christianity where baptism did not demand conversion, forgiveness of sins did not require genuine repentance, and one could ignore the cross of Jesus Christ in a sacramental church that never became the church of Jesus Christ in solidarity with the victims of a racist tyranny.²¹ Like Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King once challenged his fellow citizens to dream with him of the day when Americans could truly believe that all people are created equal and then "go out and carve a tunnel of hope from a mountain of despair."²²

IV. RADICAL FAITH AND THE CRITIQUE OF AN OPPRESSOR NATION

But the mountains of despair stand like an omnipresent blight everywhere in the Americas. They are filled with the poor who cry out for com-

²¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 45-60.

²² Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream," Keynote Address of the March on Washington, D.C. for Civil Rights, August 28, 1963.

passion. Sometimes that cry takes on the form of a plea that people in the United States realize their country has become, wittingly or unwittingly, an oppressor nation that contributes in its own naive or cynical way to the degradation that torments the poor. To that effect, over a decade ago, 13 Christian leaders from Latin America sent an "Open Letter" to their fellow Christians in North America that still begs for an answer. In that letter, the churches of North America were told as never before the

sad and painful . . . reality, the scandalous intervention of the United States in the installation and maintenance of military regimes; . . . the discoveries [regarding the activities of] the CIA and other agencies of penetration and espionage in our countries; the shameful Panamanian enclave with its military training centers that our Christian and Latin American consciences cannot tolerate any longer . . . Today, we Latin Americans are discovering that apart from our own weaknesses and sins, not a few of our misfortunes, miseries and frustrations flow from and are perpetuated within a system that produces substantial benefits for your country but goes on swallowing us more and more in oppression, in impotence, in death. . . . Friends and fellow Christians, it is time that you realize that our continent is becoming one gigantic prison, and in some regions one vast cemetery: that human rights, the grand guidelines of the Gospel, are becoming a dead letter, without force. And all this in order to maintain a system, a structure of dependency, that benefits the mighty privileged persons of a minority of your land and of our land at the expense of the poor millions who are increasing throughout the width and breadth of the continent.²³

It is not easy to hear one's country called a predator nation like that. Nor is it easy to read that the churches of North America have been at least indirectly responsible for the evils inflicted on the poorer classes of Latin America. It is easier to resist the notion that one has been an accomplice in the violence done to a peasant in a country not one's own. But everywhere in Latin America there are the "barometer people" of our own faith who tell of their grievances against the United States perceived by them as the militaristic bully that maintains the systemic injustice of brutality, terror, disappearances, and outright torture and murder aimed at keeping a peasant people cowed and submissive.

Such policies are often generated by rich power brokers who have en-

²³ Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *The Politics of Compassion* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 8.

joyed the good life because of their ability to run profitable business ventures that exploit cheap labor. A manager for Bank of America operations in Guatemala stated in an interview what he felt should be done to leftist agitators for a more just society. His words ring with the simplicity of a John Bircher: "What they should do is declare martial law. There you catch somebody; they go to a military court. The colonels are sitting there; you're guilty, you're shot. It works very well."²⁴ He could have added that such a practice had become rather routine in Guatemala since the CIA-sponsored coup of 1954. The military dictatorships that followed have been linked directly to the murder of countless thousands of Guatemalans, many at the hands of the special forces trained by the United States Office of Public Safety.

This bank manager is not alone in these fascist attitudes. Fred Sherwood, who flew in the CIA strike force that toppled the democratically elected government of Arbenz in 1954, is now owner of a rubber plantation and a cement factory in Guatemala, and was once president of the American Chamber of Commerce there, has also profited enormously from what has become a businessman's dream: high profits and low costs, in a land where two percent of the population owns seventy percent of the land, where seventy percent of the people make no more than about seventy-five dollars per year, where most of the peasant class can neither read nor write and where the infant death rate is the highest in Central America. When asked about the systematic murder of politicians who try to reform the system, he stated categorically that one can't count the peasants among the number and that, at most, there were only a hundred and twenty assassinated in his region during the year in which the interview took place. But, he added, those people "are our enemies. They're against *our way of life*." He then added: "Why should we be worried about the death squads? They're bumping off the commies, our enemies. I'd give them more power. Hell, I'd get some cartridges if I could . . . Why should we criticize them? The death squads—I'm for it . . . We all feel that he [President Reagan] is our savior."²⁵ In what sense savior? It was President Reagan who bypassed Congress to supply the military in Guatemala with weapons and to lift the military embargo in 1983, despite that country's sad record of human rights violations.

V. FAITH, SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR, MARTYRDOM IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Not all Americans, however, have behaved like latter-day *conquistadores* toward the indigenous population of Latin America. Nor have all Ameri-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43, 67. Italics added.

cans become unquestioning adjuncts of United States foreign policy or exporters of the so-called American way of life among the disadvantaged in this troubled sector of the world. Some Americans have freely chosen to live among the poorer classes of Latin America as missionaries, as members of Witness for Peace, or as part of any number of peace and justice organizations, such as the Center for Global Service and Education, the Central America Peace Campaign, or the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, and others, in which they bring to these people not the abstract ideology of the cold war, but the gospel of Jesus' solidarity with the poor and the commitment to uproot the systemic violence that has spiraled out of control.

Often the struggle is against the force of United States foreign policy for that region and for the sensitization of Americans to the tragedy inflicted upon the "little people" of the world in the name of the idol of national security or the myths of American-styled democracy that panders only to the interests of the few over the needs of the multitudes. The inequity of the struggle has prompted one missionary-analyst, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, to call the oppressed people of Central America "holy," not because they are sinless, "but because their needless suffering raises a cry for repentance and compassion that offers them and their oppressors the possibility for healing, conversion, and redemption . . . The poor in Central America are suffering not only from the weight of U.S. arrogance and domination, they are also suffering for the liberation of the people and the nation responsible for their oppression."²⁶

Because of the clearly-evidenced involvement of the United States in the plight of the poorer classes of Latin America, the martyrdom of the four American church women (Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke of Maryknoll, Sister Dorothy Kazel of the Ursulines, and Jean Donovan, a young volunteer worker) became an inspiring testimony to the concern of that other America unseduced by the idol of national security that targets the weakest segment of the Latin American population for coercion and containment. These women were murdered on December 2, 1980 at the end of several acts of violence against church advocates for the rights of the poor peasants of the region. These included the killing of priests and lay people, arrests and disappearances, bombings, and the infamous massacre of 300 Salvadoran peasants trapped at the Sumpul River while fleeing an army terror squad on May 14.²⁷

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁷ Philip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 146-158.

Even before that massacre the outside world had been shocked at the coldly-calculated murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero just after his sermon during a celebration of the Lord's Supper on March 24. His death came as he prayed that the Eucharist would "feed us so that we may give our body and our blood to suffering and pain, as Christ did, not for himself but to give ideas of justice and peace to our people."²⁸ His prayer was answered in some ways by these American women whose lives had been dedicated to alleviating the sufferings of the people with whom they had been working at the invitation of Archbishop Romero. Their deaths should have opened the eyes of many in the United States to the violence inflicted upon those who dare criticize openly the Salvadoran government or the military elites. The martyrs' lives and radical faith have become a profound challenge to North Americans to recognize the reality of poverty and violence among a people who consider themselves victims of a U.S.A.-sponsored aggression.

Because these American women had shared in the journey of the poor people of El Salvador and, like the biblical Ruth, had declared to them that wherever the poor went, they would go, and wherever the poor lived, they would live, that wherever the poor died, they would die and there be buried beside them, they have been claimed by the people of El Salvador as their own. They have become part of the growing martyrology of the Christian communities throughout Central America and the seed of a budding solidarity between the faith communities of El Salvador and of their native United States. For the Salvadoran Jesuit, Jon Sobrino, the murdered Christ has come to them in the person of these four women. He spoke of their life and death with the people as the gift of Christ to them. That they had come from the United States which had sent and continues to send so much destruction was a sign of hope and a testimony to the sisterhood of the churches of the two countries. In Sobrino's words:

The dead Christ is present among us in the person of four Americans. The United States is everywhere in El Salvador. We have U.S. businessmen and military experts. We have a U.S. embassy here to decide the fate of Salvadorans without consulting them. We have U.S. arms, we have U.S. helicopters to pursue and bombard the civilian population. But we have something else from the United States, too. We have American Christians, priests, and nuns. These have given us the best the United States had to offer; faith in Jesus instead of faith in the almighty dollar; love for persons instead of love for an imperialist plan;

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

a thirst for justice instead of a lust for exploitation. With these four Americans, Christ, although he came from a far-off land, was no stranger in El Salvador . . .²⁹

Sobrino's words are a powerful confession of faith not only in the modern story of Jesus crucified and risen anew but also in the way Christ has become, in the blood of the four church women and others like them, a liberator of his people. To the peasants of El Salvador these women, like their Archbishop before them, are a reminder that life in Christ and death for his sake are the way Christians can change their world and bring freedom to those enchained in systemic poverty and oppression.

Their confession of radical faith in God's promise to deliver the people whose cry he has heard echo the lines from a poem by the Guatemalan poet, Julia Esquivel. Esquivel, founder of the Committee for Peace and Justice in Guatemala but now living in exile, insists that the poor cannot be deterred by threats of killings at the hands of the death squads. "They have threatened us with resurrection," not death, she says to her fellow Christians in the struggle for justice. And this because "there are always others to relieve us in bearing the courage necessary to arrive at the goal which lies beyond death."³⁰ One of her prayer poems captures well the spirit that animates the radical faith of those who have become Christ to an oppressed people. Her "Lord's Prayer from Guatemala" is the prayer of the "little people" whose Father God, brother Jesus, and loving Spirit won't let them go under. Two petitions from this modern "Our Father" might serve here as a conclusion to summarize both the aspirations for social liberation of the masses of suffering poor in the Americas and the challenge of the gospel that must be faced in order to fulfill the Father's promise to deliver these people.

Let your Kingdom come,
your Kingdom which is Freedom and Love,
which is Brotherhood and Justice,
which is Righteousness and Life,
which is Truth and not lies . . .
Your Kingdom which does not make deals
with the interests of those who force
the poor to work like beasts,

²⁹ Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 155.

³⁰ Julia Esquivel, "They Have Threatened Us With Resurrection," *Threatened With Resurrection* (Elgin, Ill.: The Brethren Press, 1982), p. 61.

nor with those who institute violence
in the juridical structure and the judicial system . . .
who call themselves Christians . . .
Let your will be done, Lord,
which means removing all yokes that oppress humanity,
your will which is a Proclamation of the Good News to the poor,
comfort for those who grieve,
freedom for prisoners and strength for the tortured,
liberation and life for those who suffer violence. . . . Amen!³¹

³¹ "The Lord's Prayer from Guatamala," in *Ibid.*, pp. 15-29.

Evangelism and Social Witness

by THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

President Thomas W. Gillespie was invited to address the Presbytery of New Brunswick at its meeting in December, 1990. His theme of the inseparability of Christian mission and social ethics is especially appropriate for this issue of the Bulletin in honor of Charles C. West.

SPEAKING to this presbytery on the topic of Evangelism and Social Witness is a formidable assignment, formidable meaning not “tending to inspire awe or wonder” but rather “exciting fear” and “having qualities that discourage approach” (Webster). For this assigned topic is, at least in our denomination, not one but two. Evangelism and social witness are viewed among us Presbyterians as theological antitheses, as ecclesiastical antagonists, and as programmatic alternatives rather than complementary aspects of a unified mission and a single obedience. They represent the poles of our polarization, the agendas of our conservative and liberal parties, the slogans of our warring factions. It is asking a lot of that little connective word “and” to hold these two topics in tension, creative or otherwise, much less in harmony. So I say again that the task you have assigned to me is formidable indeed.

My temptation, quite frankly, is to play to the house by addressing one side of the aisle and then the other, by saying a good word first about evangelism and then putting in a plug for social witness. There would thus be something for everyone, and all would hear at least a little of what they want to hear. But that would be dodging rather than biting the bullet, and would leave us where we are in a family of faith that is becoming ever more dysfunctional. What needs to be said—and heard—is a compelling call to repentance on all sides. For we are deceiving ourselves if we think that this duality of evangelism and social witness is of God. The gospel of Jesus Christ simply does not set before us such options, and faith does not authorize us to choose the one or the other. So the very posing of the issue in these terms involves us in a contradiction.

How is it then that we have painted ourselves into such a corner? The answer, I think, is that our dilemma is a part of our ecclesiastical inheritance. Our generation did not create this unholy split. We have merely accepted it from the tradition uncritically and lived out of it unproductively. I will say more in a moment about the historical origins of this false way of framing the issues of Christian discipleship. Let me first say a word about its unproductivity. The truth of the matter is that the Presbyterian Church today is not very effective in either its evangelism or its social witness.

With regard to the former, as the sociologists remind us, our numerical growth historically has come from living off the evangelistic efforts of other churches. As people converted to Christ elsewhere moved up the socio-economic ladder, they tended in times past to gravitate into our communion. But those days, so we are told, are gone forever. The point is that our lack of experience in reaching out to the non-believer handicaps us now that our steady institutional demise has caught our attention and aroused our belated interest in evangelism.

Even now, however, we are better at *talking* about evangelism (in any style) than *doing* it. Recently, for example, I heard this question: What is the difference between a Presbyterian and a Mormon? Answer: A Presbyterian is one who knocks on your door and has nothing to say. Now I am not advocating that we learn how to peddle the gospel door to door. But I am suggesting that we are not going to *do* evangelism of any kind until we first have something to say to the world, some good news to share with the world, and, second, learn how to talk among ourselves and to others about matters of personal faith. Until then our efforts in this direction will be largely limited to inviting neighbors to visit our church in the hope that the minister will say a good word for the Lord. Or as I once heard a mayor of Kansas City put it at a gathering of Presbyterian Men, we will "commend the local factory-trained mechanic."

With regard to social witness, our track record is not much better. At least that is how I read the tea leaves. During the early years of my pastoral ministry, the Presbyterian Church made a redemptive impression upon the nation during the Civil Rights struggle. Even the secular media took notice when Eugene Carson Blake, then our Stated Clerk, was arrested for an act of civil disobedience at a Baltimore amusement park. But those days of our attracting public attention by our corporate pronouncements and representative actions also have vanished. The General Assembly speaks today and no one listens, not even the great majority of our church members. No doubt this is due in part to the continuing process of disestablishment which the so-called mainline churches are experiencing in this country at this time. Having been traditionally a part of the Protestant establishment, having become accustomed to piping the moral tune to the society, we Presbyterians are now developing emotional hernias because we are being ever more marginalized in American culture. Please hear me clearly. I am not suggesting that we should stop making public statements of our corporate conscience. Our Reformed faith will not permit us that heresy. I am simply noting that we are not making a significant difference in the body of politic any longer

by this means. So the bottom line, as I read it, is that we are not very productive in either evangelism or social action. And that, I would argue, is cause for at least a modicum of real humility on all sides.

Let's move on now to the ecclesiastical inheritance that put us on the horns of this dilemma. I am thinking, of course, about our Reformed theological tradition. George Marsden, who teaches American Church History at Duke Divinity School, points out that there are at least three distinct currents in the stream of our tradition. One is the *confessionalist* current. This is represented historically by those Presbyterians who have contended that a Christian is one who believes sound doctrine. They have been called variously the "Old Side," the "Old Lights," and the "Old School." Champions of doctrinal orthodoxy, as measured by the Westminster standards, these folks were represented in a previous time by the likes of Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield. Piety and ethics were not trivial matters to these defenders of the old "Princeton Theology," but they were secondary to correct theological understanding. The remnant of those holding to this position by and large went out the door of the Presbyterian Church in 1936 with J. Gresham Machen and have not been heard from since.

A second current is the *conversionist*. Spawned by the Great Awakenings, the position of these Presbyterians was and is that sound doctrine apart from a transformed life is of no avail. What matters most is not having your theological head screwed on correctly, but having your heart converted by an experience of God's redeeming grace. Here personal faith and a passion for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have never heard or accepted it are the focal issues. Called at various times the "New Side," the "New Lights," and the "New School," these Presbyterians were and are committed to evangelism. They are the ones primarily responsible for the participation of our Church in the great missionary movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

What is significant about New School Presbyterianism, and often forgotten, is that it was also deeply involved in what we would call today social witness. These were the ones who led the abolitionist charge against slavery, who engaged in prison reform, who fought "demon rum." Some of their social concerns may seem rather tame by our standards, but the point is that there was a time in our tradition when those who were committed to the evangelization of the society were equally concerned about the reform of that society. The split, in other words, is neither historically sanctioned nor theologically necessary. So what caused it?

The answer, I think, is the third current that runs through our Reformed

tradition. Marsden calls it the *culturalist* current that has historically devoted itself to engaging our American intellectual culture. These Presbyterians have felt pressed to bring the theology of the Church into some kind of rapprochement with the new findings of the natural and social sciences as well as the new philosophical winds that continue to blow across the land. What emerged out of this concern in due season was modern liberal theology, which has led to a dramatic and, some would say, radical revision of Christian belief. Liberal theology has also tended to orient itself to moral issues, and this has led it characteristically into movements of social reform.

The plot thickens when we recognize that both the conversionist and culturalist currents are the children of New School Presbyterianism. Don Shriver, the President of Union Theological Seminary in New York City, enjoys teasing me about Union being a New School institution in distinction from Princeton's Old School origins. That is historically the case, of course, but if that observation has any contemporary significance, then Union must claim Fuller as its alter ego because liberalism and evangelicalism are siblings of the New School. However that may be, the important point is that it was New School liberalism's commitment to doctrinal revision that made its concern for public morality suspect in the eyes of New School evangelicalism. In reaction, evangelicalism turned away increasingly from its own passion for social reform. Since the confessionalism of the Old School has for the most part dropped out of our Church, what we are left with is the inheritance of this New School dichotomy between evangelism and social witness. This split, I would again note, is the result of historical contingency but not of theological necessity.

In point of fact, our Reformed tradition is at its best when it takes seriously the concerns of all three of its currents, the Old School concern for theological integrity, the New School evangelical concern for redemptive experience and personal faith, and the New School liberal concern for social and cultural transformation.

Is there then a way out of this impasse? Ever the optimist, I believe there is. What we need is a recovery of the fullness and richness of our tradition. To achieve this we need a new paradigm, a new way of conceptualizing our common task in ministry and mission. We need a rubric that will allow us to do with theological integrity the kinds of ministry that we presently designate by the terms *evangelism* and *social action*. These words have their own integrity, but they encourage the inference that our mission is double rather than single. Let me suggest, therefore, that we recover the more comprehensive biblical word *witness*.

Darrell Guder, the Dean of the Faculty at our Presbyterian Whitworth College, makes this point vigorously and convincingly in his splendid book entitled *Be My Witnesses*. His argument is that the biblical term "witness" is a rubric sufficiently broad in its scope to include our responsibility before God for both personal evangelizing and social reforming. According to Guder, our witness to Jesus Christ is made in three primal ways. First comes our *being* Christians. What we are by faith, who we understand ourselves to be, is the basis of all authentic Christian witness. Professor Paul Lehmann taught our class in seminary to pose the ethical question this way, What am I as a believer in Jesus Christ and a member of his church to do? The insight here is that our doing emerges out of our being. What Christians do derives from being believers in Jesus Christ and members of his church. That is what Guder is getting at as well. His second point is that the witness of *being* leads to the witness of *doing*. The Christian life manifests itself in actions that testify to the redeeming love of God in Jesus Christ for both individuals and their social world. Such actions range from feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, to creating a society in which people can feed and clothe themselves, to challenging the principalities and powers when they dehumanize human life. But one of the things we do as believers in Jesus Christ and members of his Church is speak of Jesus Christ to the world. The being that leads to doing leads also to *saying*. According to Guder, we earn the right to *say* when we *do* what we *are*.

One of comedian Flip Wilson's unforgettable quips is this: "I'm a Jehovah's Bystander. They asked me to be a Witness, but I didn't want to get involved." Ultimately, as I see it, that is the fundamental issue. Do we want to get involved? Do we want to get involved with Jesus Christ? Do we want to get involved with the world God loves? Do we want to get involved with the people for whom Christ lived and died? Flip was right. Either we are witnesses or bystanders. The Presbyterian Church can be true to its *being* only by its *doing* and its *saying*. For that is what it means to be a witness.

BOOK REVIEWS

Barbour, Ian G. *Religion in an Age of Science*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990. Pp. xv + 297. \$29.95.

Ian Barbour, who has taught at Carleton College in Minnesota for many years, has also been one of the very few outstanding figures in the debate about the appropriate relation between science, religion, and ethics. The present book is one of two which arise from his Gifford Lectures in Aberdeen, Scotland in 1989 and 1990. The second volume will be devoted to ethical values and technology. Since such issues are usually associated with redemption, and tend to concentrate on personal and social issues to the neglect of their connection with the natural order, this first volume provides the basis for what will follow by reformulating the doctrine of creation, which is also important in its own right.

Of course, reformulating the doctrine of creation in the light of science is a multifaceted task, involving strategies, methods, substantial claims, and larger metaphysical issues, and it is Barbour's encyclopaedic treatment of these which many readers will value particularly. The book is reminiscent of early 19th century attempts to synthesize all the relevant materials within a comprehensive frame of reference. The fact that he does this while giving full recognition to the distinctive features of each, and without collapsing either religion or science into the other, makes Barbour's treatment of the issues very fair. But it also means that he prefers moderate positions in both religion and science to those which might defeat the synthesis by carrying them out of reach of each other.

Generally, his strategy is to make an informed comparison of the structure of religion with parallels in science. This brings the two into dialogue with each other, and provides for their integration in a common framework at certain points. Their commonness does not lie in the fact that each is a way of thinking about the world, though Barbour gives an important place to paradigms, models, and so on, but in that they are kinds of critical realism, which meet in "some references to a common world." Both make cognitive claims about realities beyond the human world, though each such claim is both more influenced by prior beliefs or theories and formed more imaginatively than is commonly supposed. Barbour carefully threads his way through the vast variety of positions which appear in both as regards methods and substantial claims (theories) about the world and its inhabitants, very helpfully building a picture of both methods and the world as dynamic and interconnected. Correspondingly, when he turns to philosophical and theological reflection in Part III, and to the task of building a view of nature and humanity with God, he turns away from the more static views which have permeated historical science and religion in past eras. It is dynamic interaction—particularly as this is construed in process thought—which is central.

The synthesis which Barbour presents is impressive in vision, range, and detail.

As such, it is more developed than his previous work, but not different in its central features. It will be even more helpful to the study of the relations of religion and science than have been his previous writings. At the same time, it is a work which concentrates on the general features of religion and science, subsuming particularities in each in these general features, and containing their disagreements within general discussions about plurality and dialogue. If one insists on the more particular and substantial claims made in each, Barbour's panoramic view may seem to blur important features of religion, science, and their relation. For example, he takes it that "religious experience and the stories and rituals of a religious community" are the most fundamental aspects of religion, and that beliefs emerge through reflection on these. While a very widespread view of the nature of religion, this tends to disallow the stronger claims as to what constitutes "true religion" which are found in the positive religions.

The departicularizing of religion is accentuated by his choice of process thought as the vehicle for philosophical and theological reflection. An unkind way of describing the result would be to say that it brings religion and science together as philosophies, with a particular philosophy chosen as mediating. That is informative and stimulating, of course. But one can finish the book with an unease that Barbour has glossed over many of the features which religious people at least take as primary. Even so, he provides a remarkably wide-ranging and synthetic treatment of the subject, combining an up-to-date survey of the debate with a statement of his own position. As such, it is a highly valuable book.

DANIEL W. HARDY
Center of Theological Inquiry

Taylor, Mark Kline, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990. Pp. 292. \$29.95.

In this book the author wants to interpret the Christian message in the present historical context, which he calls post-modern, characterized by a new appreciation of tradition, the recognition of pluralism, and resistance to the powers of darkness. Since tradition, pluralism, and resistance cannot easily be harmonized, the author speaks of the post-modern trilemma. How do we read the Christian texts so that they shed light on this trilemma? Here the author turns to the literature of hermeneutics and opts for an emancipatory, cultural-political reading of texts.

But where should one start the critical reading? The author here remembers *Esperanza*, a young girl that looked after the author when he was five years old and living with his anthropologist parents in Central America. Remembering *Esperanza* now prompts the author to begin his cultural-political critique with the omnipresent, many-levelled, conscious and unconscious sexism, mediated by religious and secular traditions, source of the suffering of women. Then the author turns to

an analysis of the complex intertwining between sexism and two other structures of exclusion: racism, and classism.

In the second part of the book, the author offers a radical reconstruction of the Christian kerygma so that it becomes a promise and pledge of emancipation in the North American context characterized by the post-modern trilemma. Here he develops in an imaginative way the paradoxical symbol of *Christus Mater*.

This is an exciting book written for theologians. I recommend it highly. It is often demanding but I could not put it down. The overviews of several ranges of critical literature are interesting and rewarding. The last thing the author wants is that the reader agree with him. The book is written to help North Americans come to greater self-knowledge and stimulate critical theological thinking. The tone of the book is modest and invites conversation.

What the book leaves out, from my point of view, is a dialogue with sociologists. Because the author dialogues only with anthropologists, he does not even try to understand the United States as world power and does not recognize the ways in which even the underprivileged in the United States participate in the drama of empire. This was my reaction to the book, I note, even before the outbreak of the Gulf War. The absence of a social analysis is symbolized by the author's constant use of the term North America as if Canada did not exist. The absence of social analysis explains why, despite the radical critique of domination, no emancipatory political strategy, no search for alliances, and no social project seems to emerge from Mark Taylor's contextual reading of the gospel.

From my point of view, the book also leaves out sufficient reflection on the resurrection. The author's beautiful references to the creative and redemptive birthing taking place in troubled humanity remain vague and abstract. And to exclude altogether *Esperanza's* faith in life beyond death is an intellectual strategy that seems to invalidate part of the central New Testament message and leaves forever unredeemed the poorest of the poor, the millions of *Esperanza's* brothers and sisters who die young, killed by hunger or war. The experience of Latin American base communities reveals that belief in resurrection does not weaken the dedication of people to the historical struggle for emancipation.

GREGORY BAUM
McGill University

To Confess the Faith Today, Essays on the New Brief Statement of Faith of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Jack L. Stotts and Jane Dempsey Douglass, eds. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. Pp. 144. \$4.95.

When the Presbyterian Church in the USA, which had been split at the time of the severance of the southern and northern parts of the country over a hundred years ago, was reunited in one body in 1984, one of its first acts was a decision to draw up a brief statement of faith as an index of the church's continuing fidelity to

the faith once delivered to the saints and its resolve to persist in the profession and practice of it. The Brief Statement is the outcome of this resolve. It was drawn up by a committee of over a dozen people who worked together on it for five years.

The result of their labors has now been published in this small volume, along with a number of essays which explain the nature and purpose of the document and some of the problems which were encountered in the preparation of it.

The first thing to be noted is that the Statement is not intended to present a complete theological account of the doctrines of the faith but to show how we may appropriate and express the fundamental elements of the faith in accordance with the Reformed tradition in which we stand. It is intended as a liturgical statement to be used in the course of worship as a means for the congregation to confess its faith.

The Statement commends itself to this purpose by its brevity; it consists of 452 words, and it is possible that people may come by frequent repetition to know it by heart as most of us know by heart the Apostles' Creed with its 110 words. The language of the Statement is plain and straightforward; and it is free of theological technicalities, except for the unfortunate introduction of the term "triune" in line 5. I think it is also impaired by a tendency to use Biblical phrases or echoes of Biblical phrases, such as the nursing mother and the father of the prodigal, which are more appropriate in preaching than in confession. The phrase "this Jesus" in line 23 is puzzling and distracting. It is taken from Acts 2:23 (RSV) in a passage referring to the controversy between Jews and Christians, but it is not relevant to a Christian confession of faith in the risen Lord, which should focus on the thoughts expressed in lines 25 and 26.

I am afraid that the Confession gets off to a bad start when it says that we "belong" to God. "Belong" in common speech applies to the relation of property to its owner, not to a relation between personal beings. No wife would say that she belongs to her husband, and no husband would like to hear her say it.

There is also a peculiarity about the order in which the topics are taken up. It is strange that the mission and work of Jesus Christ is introduced (lines 9-26) before mention is made of human sin and its consequences (lines 33-39); and then the redemptive love of God in Christ is brought in a second time in lines 40-51. This gives the Statement a tinge of supralapsarianism, which is not found in any of the confessions of the church.

There is one feature in the presentation of Jesus Christ and his work which is particularly to be welcomed, and that is the inclusion of what he did between his birth and his death on the cross—his ministry of teaching and his acts of love and compassion for human pain and suffering. In this matter the Statement deviates from the pattern of all previous creeds and confessions, and it even parts company with Calvin, who noted that the Creed, as he put it, moves "incontinently" from the birth of Christ to the death, and was content to have it so (a full account of

Calvin's treatment of this matter may be found in the present writer's book, *The Gospel of the Incarnation*, 1958, p. 35).

In its treatment of what has always been the central topic of Christian faith, human sin and salvation through Christ, the Statement departs from the very general terms which we have used in confessing our sin, and which run off us like water off a duck's back, and presents it in specifics which are better fitted to convince us of our sin in our time. Likewise the Statement presents no theory of the atoning work of Christ. It refers us to the work of God the Holy Spirit in the renewal of life, which is the goal of salvation; and it rehearses the means of grace, but it has barely anything to say on how we may use them to our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

The constraint of brevity in the Statement has had one truly sad consequence in the absence of any reference to the providence of God. This reflects the fact that was lamented more than a generation ago by Langdon Gilkey when he said that providence had become "the forgotten stepchild of contemporary theology." The doctrine of God's providential preservation and government of his creatures is one that affects us all in our lives most intimately; and if our faith is not nurtured here by the daily practice of prayer and meditation, it will be sadly debilitated.

GEORGE S. HENDRY
Princeton Theological Seminary

Barton, John. *People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1988. Pp. 96. \$7.95.

The author of this little book, Lecturer in Old Testament and Fellow and Chaplain of St. Cross College, Oxford, proposes an approach to the Bible which attempts to avoid, at one extreme, a wooden literalism and at the other, a wooly liberalism. His thesis is that the Bible, as a *book*, is not authoritative; Christians, unlike Moslems and perhaps Jews, are not a "people of the book." Rather, authority is vested in what early Church Fathers called the "rule of faith"—that is, the content of faith which the church received from Jesus Christ. What the Bible is all about is the divine "input" into the human situation: "the love of God for a fallen world and his will to restore it through Christ." This is the *res scripturae*, "the matter of scripture," and this gospel frees one to engage in a critical approach to the biblical text.

Responding to this thesis my Methodist heart is strangely warmed; indeed, I wonder how any Christian could seriously disagree, even the fundamentalists on the British scene against whom the author's polemic is directed throughout the book. However, as the thesis unfolds through eight engaging chapters, plenty of room is left for question and debate as faith seeks understanding.

One question is what this christocentric view means for the relation of the Old Testament to the New. "The Christian gospel," says the author, "is not that a new God, never before known, has just been revealed in Jesus. It is that the God who

already is known has, nevertheless, just done something new and unprecedented—something which means nothing less than the remaking of the world” (p. 9). Agreed, it is important to stress—and to stress first—the deep discontinuity between the old and the new. In Christ something new—a new creation—has dawned, which outshines the old in splendor (2 Cor. 5:17). But surely this *Novum* should not be exaggerated to the extreme of saying that “contrast is the essence of the gospel and in this the retention of the old Scriptures is an essential step.” It is inadequate to say that the church retains the Old Testament lest “the new loses its newness!” Failure to grasp the dialectic of discontinuity/continuity draws an unnecessary separating line between the Jewish and Christian communities, both of whom belong together in the mystery of God’s calling of a people and are heirs together of God’s promises, as Paul forcefully argued (Rom. 9-11). Moreover, a more theocentric approach will recognize that the Old Testament contains positive theological dimensions, not found in the New or else presupposed there, which are essential for the faith of the church.

For Barton the notion that the Bible is “Word of God” or the view that it is witness to God’s *revelation* are untenable. Agreeing with James Barr, to whom he acknowledges indebtedness along the way, he declares that “the Bible is not revelation about an unknown God, but a document that witnesses to the relationship of a people with a God who is already known before Scripture is written.” He proposes that wisdom literature, rather than prophetic proclamation, is the normative model, at least for the Old Testament. The words of the Bible are human words, expressions of human wisdom, and specifically “people’s reflection on their relationship with the known God” (p. 56). To be sure, the Bible has its proper place in worship, provided that one is attentive to the literary genre being read. However, “a thoughtful consideration of the way the Bible functions in worship makes ‘This is the Word of the Lord’ little more than comic as a concluding formula” (p. 78).

Preoccupation with the problem of fundamentalism on the British scene must account for the author’s failure to consider how the issue of biblical authority is dealt with in various liberation theologies. He considers certain hermeneutical developments on the American scene, such as canonical criticism (Brevard Childs) or the new literary criticism (e.g. Robert Alter), because he thinks that these play into the hands of biblicism. It is inexcusable, however, that he does not even mention the feminist movement which, at least in the United States, has issued the most important challenge to the authority of Scripture in the twentieth century.

This is a thought-provoking book! Reading it will help in the struggle to understand what we Christians mean when we use the cliché “Word of God” in reference to the Bible or in connection with lectionary readings. The book could well be the basis for a sermon series or, better yet, for give-and-take discussions in an adult forum.

BERNHARD W. ANDERSON
Boston University

Seow, C. L. *Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David's Dance*. Harvard Semitic Museum Monographs, No. 44. Frank Moore Cross, ed. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989. Pp. 272. \$22.95.

This attractive volume explores the significance of the account in 2 Sam. 6 where the ark of the covenant is brought into Jerusalem. Along the way, the reader is treated to clear, succinct discussions of several important issues concerning the life and faith of early Israel that range beyond the biblical text itself. The author, a professor of OT at Princeton Theological Seminary, dedicates his book to his teacher, F. M. Cross, and the influence of the teacher is apparent. The book is full of careful philological detail and comparison to the Ancient Near Eastern context of the biblical account. It is not written primarily for the theological student or minister, but both can use the volume with profit.

Seow rejects an easy separation between myth and history in his analysis. Even if it could be demonstrated that the account of the ark's transfer to Jerusalem is straightforward historical reporting, the mythic overtones of the Canaanite cultural matrix give significance to the rituals of David's dance and the ark's procession. The author does believe that the account in 2 Sam. 6 (supplemented by Ps. 132) still preserves the outline of a ritual procession with the ark that served to legitimate David's rule and that of his successors. Seow gives careful attention to ritual detail without the multiplication of social science jargon and provides rather extended discussions of the Canaanite context (derived primarily from Ugaritic texts). And on the whole, his treatment of the account offers fresh insight on a number of details in the context such as the placement of the Philistine's defeat at Ba'al Perasim in 2 Sam. 5:17f. and the nature of David's dance before the ark.

The author proposes that important clues to the significance of the ark—and thus the deity it represents—can be derived from two places it resided before the transfer to Jerusalem, namely Shiloh and Qiryat Ye'arim. The latter site is known by several names (e.g., Ba'alalah, Mt. Ba'alalah), and according to 1 Sam. 7:1-2, the ark resided there for 20 years in the house of Abinadab. To summarize briefly, Seow proposes that the worship of Yahweh in Shiloh took on the characteristics of 'El worship ('El was the "high god" of the Canaanite pantheon), and in Qiryat Ye'arim, the worship of Yahweh took on certain characteristics of Ba'al, whom the author describes as "the young god on the rise."

Although the main threads of Seow's proposal are plausible and competently presented, they are not all equally persuasive. Inevitably there are differences over details, but consider the claim that elements of the Ba'al myth (a god who is defeated but returns to triumph) were located at Qiryat Ye'arim and influential for the early Israelite understanding of Yahweh. This proposal is important to the author's thesis. Seow assumes that there was a sanctuary at the site. There is, in fact, no explicit statement to that effect in the OT as there is for Shiloh. There is only the reference to Abinadab's house and the remark that his son was consecrated to

care for the ark upon its arrival. The ark was also stored at the house of Obed Edom (2 Sam. 6:10-11). Does this mean there was a sanctuary at his house also? And then there is the question of locating the myth of Ba'al at the site. The only reason to do so is the alternate name of the site (Ba'alalah, mentioned above). But does this name refer to the Canaanite storm deity or to Yahweh? The OT preserves several place names with the element Ba'al. A good example is the place name Ba'al Perasim, where the Philistines were defeated by David. It is also the only Ba'al place name in the OT with an etiological account provided for its name. According to 2 Sam. 5:20, David names the site Ba'al Perasim because Yahweh had broken forth upon his enemies. Yahweh is called Ba'al (Lord, owner) by David and the place name Ba'al Perasim is understood as a reference to Yahweh. Thus there is no compelling reason to assume a sanctuary at Qiryat Ye'arim before the arrival of the ark (or after), and if there was a sanctuary at the site, there is no compelling reason to assume it preserved the mythology of the Canaanite Ba'al.

The preceding paragraph does not render Seow's reconstruction invalid. I would suggest it merely shows the difficulty of accounting historically for what he does demonstrate with a wealth of detail: the important cultural context and mythic backgrounds to the account of the ark's transfer to Jerusalem. The book accomplishes its primary purpose and serves its intended readership well.

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Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Capps, Donald. *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990. Pp. 195. \$12.95.

Donald Capps has written an instructive book demonstrating how reframing can assist ministers to help persons experience transformative change. Basing his interpretation of reframing in the communication theory of Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland, and Richard Fish, and in the brief therapy model of family therapy, Capps demonstrates how the method of reframing is "appropriate for virtually every pastoral care and counseling situation." He contends that the concept and method of reframing best expresses the "wise fool" approach to ministry, emphasizing paradox and radical change such as he finds in the book of Job and the parables of Jesus.

Reframing refers to the activity of changing the meaning of events by changing the emotional and/or conceptual framework through which they are interpreted. Such a change of perception under optimal conditions leads to second-order change in behaviors and emotional responses. By second-order change, Capps means any change which alters a system itself, in distinction from first-order change which enables an established system to run more smoothly. Capps believes second-order change reflects the Bible's emphasis upon revolutionary change in which prior and common sense solutions are challenged, surprise replaces practicality, the "what" is

emphasized over the "why," and circular repetition of a problem is replaced by genuine advance. The steps in problem-solving through reframing techniques include concretely defining the problem, exploring solutions already attempted, defining the desired change, and formulating a plan to produce change. Capps underscores the need to develop a reframe which is specific to the person and the facts of each situation.

Throughout the book, Capps describes numerous types of reframing techniques and illustrates them in the light of pastoral situations. In spite of the somewhat confusing number of reframing techniques, Capps recognizes that the underlying concern in all is to work for the person and "against the dysfunctional attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs which the person, implicitly at least, wants changed." Thus, when one uses paradoxical intention to prescribe the very thing one fears, the intention is to change the relationship between fear and desire so that the person is rendered more powerful than vulnerable. Likewise, deflecting attention from painful material is to help persons gain coping skills rather than to avoid or deny reality.

Capps devotes several chapters to linking his theory to the ministry of Jesus and more especially to the book of Job. Jesus' healing and teaching evidenced a variety of reframes, all of which "sought significant change in the minds, hearts and bodies of individuals by enabling them to think about things differently, to see the world in a new way, and to experience a new openness." In his captivating discussion of the book of Job, his main argument is that Job's friends' solutions failed because they were rooted in theories of change (and pastoral techniques) which did not enable them to see that conventional wisdom and prior solutions were not applicable to the events which in themselves changed Job's moral framework as well as his view of himself, reality, and God. Only God's radical reframing of Job's situation was adequate to assist Job to come to a transformed relationship to his reality.

I found this book to be clear, helpful, and insightful. It simultaneously weaves theory and practice with therapeutic and religious viewpoints. On a less positive note, I wished that a book addressed to parish clergy would not designate as "clients" the persons who receive ministry. Capps' discussion of the failures of Job's three friends (and the pastoral care methods they used) seemed a bit forced and oversimplified. Capps does not adequately address some of the ethical questions related to reframing, as in one case where he would instruct a victimized woman, in effect, to get revenge on her unjust employer. He does not explore how to prevent reframing from becoming manipulative sadism, judgmental coercion, or rejecting sarcasm. I believe that he underestimates how difficult it is to develop reframing skills. Nonetheless, the book should be quite useful in seminary classes on ministry and pastoral care, and could conceivably be the basis for fruitful discussion about the relationship of ethics, preaching, and the Bible to pastoral care. Chaplains, parish ministers, and laypersons who want to take a playfully serious journey into a

new resource for faith, self-understanding, and ministry will be rewarded by this book.

LARRY GRAHAM

Iliff School of Theology

Osmer, Richard Robert. *A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. Pp. 298. \$14.95.

Richard Osmer, a professor of Christian education at Princeton Seminary, offers with this book another angle of insight to the current conversation about the crisis in mainstream American Protestantism. Unlike many of the volumes in this growing genre of "denominational biopsy," Osmer moves beyond sociological analysis and ecclesial lament to a constructive proposal for change. His thesis is that the future health of the Protestant mainstream requires the recovery of an authoritative teaching office in the church. This is not a naive argument; Osmer makes no claim that recovery of the church's teaching authority is the whole cure nor even an easy prescription. Rather he argues for an authoritative teaching office as essential to a healthy church in a contemporary pluralistic United States. He asserts: "The single most important task before the mainline Protestant churches today is the reestablishment of a vital teaching ministry at every level of church life" (p. x). The book is an effort to substantiate this prescription.

Osmer sees the teaching office vested with three critical functions: (1) the determination of normative beliefs and practices, (2) reinterpretation of these beliefs and practices to respond to changing historical and cultural circumstances, and (3) formation and sustenance of educational structures and curricula to provide ways and means for teaching normative beliefs and practices in the church. At the heart of each of these functions is an assumption about the reality of "normative beliefs and practices" which constitute both the identity and authority of the church in society. But, as Osmer aptly notes, the "crisis" in mainstream Protestantism is precisely about the questionable presence and dubious authority of any set of beliefs and practices that could be considered normative for the contemporary church. Instead, we find ourselves living between unacceptable options. On the one hand, cultural devotion to individualism makes every person the measure of normative values, effectively denying any authority to the church to establish community beliefs and practices which may be expected to function normatively for its members. On the other hand, equally unacceptable in a community that recognizes the need for reinterpretation of traditional beliefs in a changing cultural context is the anti-cultural authoritarianism of contemporary fundamentalism. Thus Osmer's argument: that recovery of a non-authoritarian but authoritative teaching office in the church is crucial to transcending the crisis of identity and loss of influence that plagues mainstream Protestantism in modern America. Recovery of the teaching office with its

three functions once more engaged promises, Osmer believes, a "third way" for the church, an alternative to privatized religion or fundamentalist dogmatism.

Osmer finds the source for recovering the teaching office within the heritage of the Reformers. Thus the second part of the book is devoted to an historical discussion of the Roman *magisterium* and the responses to its highly structured and heavy-handed teaching office by Martin Luther and John Calvin. In John Calvin, not surprisingly, Osmer finds historical roots for a balance between structure, which the teaching office undoubtedly requires, and an openness to the Spirit, which is essential to avoiding a deadly traditionalism and to discerning the vitality of normative beliefs in changing circumstances. This balance is caught up in Calvin's description of the necessary Christian character of "a teachable spirit," a memorable phrase that provides Osmer's book its title.

The third section of the book contains positive and important proposals. From rediscovery of the form and function of the teaching office in Calvin, Osmer moves toward its recovery through a careful description of how a non-authoritarian teaching office might function with authority in each of its three tasks, performed within an educational ecology that involves three "centers of teaching authority." This ecology envisions a focus beyond the current interest in congregations as teaching centers to include denominational agencies and theological seminaries, the latter described as "centers of scholarly inquiry and clergy education." Each of the three centers has an important role to play in the performance of the teaching office's three tasks, and these roles are both distinctive and mutually supportive. This is an important idea, presented here in a helpful and provocative way.

The concluding chapter is a helpful and significant synthesis of several currents of contemporary interest. Osmer brings together his concerns for Christian education, practical theological reflection, and faith development—all issues threaded throughout the book—in a clear description of teaching tasks for the church at each of the stages of faith described by James Fowler. In this remarkable presentation, he shows his thesis and his own skills at practical theological reflection at work. Readers will be appropriately grateful.

This book is not easy reading, though its difficulty does not arise from overuse of jargon or technical argument. It requires careful, reflective reading, which it also deserves and rewards. Readers will notice the faults, including a rather repetitive style and unvaried use of some historical arguments. But these do not deflect from a monumental effort to bring together current critical events and a deep appreciation for the heritage of the Reformers in pursuit of understanding the critical role of teaching in the hoped-for recovery of an ailing church. People entrusted with the teaching office at each of the centers of authority in the church—congregational, denominational, and scholarly—may join in the conversation begun here by Richard Osmer, with thanks to him for a provocative start.

DAVID C. HESTER

Louisville Presbyterian Seminary

Macleod, Donald. *Palms & Thorns*. Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing Co., 1990. Pp. 107. \$7.00.

Donald Macleod is no stranger to homiletics or parish ministers. For over thirty years he was Francis Landey Patton Professor of Preaching at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he influenced the careers of many young ministers and maintained a helpful friendship with them long after graduation. He has also influenced non-Princetonians by his speaking engagements and his eleven books. This slender volume of sermons, *Palms and Thorns*, will add to his influence as clergy face another season of Lent and Easter.

The book has twenty messages, well-outlined and taken from the first lesson in the Common Lectionary in each case. That is, the Old Testament reading informs the sermon, rather than the more usual Gospel lesson. The only deviation is Eastertide, where the lectionary uses New Testament selections throughout. This means that prior to Easter, homiletical suggestions will come from Genesis, Exodus, Joel, Jeremiah, and II Chronicles, as well as from the more familiar passages in Isaiah.

And yet, sermons that begin in the Old Testament do not end there, as his signature sermon, "Reconciling Palms and Thorns" will testify. Old Testament texts will involve New Testament insights, though not with the calculated balance of, say, Elizabeth Achtemeier.

There are many strengths in the set of sermons. One is to see the span of the season developed in a unified way. Macleod's stress is on discipline that leads to corporate worship, serious discipleship, and a reformation balance between inner spiritual life and community involvement. He is a refreshing antidote to the relativism of our secular society and the individualism of so much conservative church life.

The first set of seven sermons for Lenten Sundays have a repentance theme: Reclaiming our Covenant, Rediscovering Our Spiritual Dimension, Restoring Our Sense of Priorities, Reviving Our Moral Responsibility, Returning to Genuine Religion. The second set of seven, those for Holy Week, stress service; whereas the last series, from Easter to Pentecost, have an outward, evangelistic-mission thrust. Thus Macleod challenges us to see the season of Lent and Easter in its entirety, and to work towards a logical, consecutive sequence.

As for the sermons themselves, they are models of a worthy school of preaching. With the exception of one, they are all deductive, where the main idea is stated clearly, and then analyzed into sections. Thus his sermon on Is. 42:1-9, Servants Without Fibre, develops the theme that to be a servant is to be a stalwart Christian rather than a lackey. To develop this idea, the sermon has three points: 1) the servant is not a loner; 2) the servant has a sense of direction in his or her calling; 3) the true servant tries to bring a measure of dignity to every act of service.

This method of preaching works for the author, and if a single method will do, then this is as good as any and better than most. However, the element of surprise

is confined to the opening development, and the three-part analysis becomes predictable in form. Sixteen of the twenty sermons have such a three-point division. This sameness is especially evident in scriptures which are stories in themselves, such as the story of the Ethiopian eunuch (Easter Journeys Out and In), which also receives the three-part treatment.

It will be interesting for those who ask themselves the question, "What makes sermons 'tick'?" to lay Macleod's consistently good method over against other styles. For instance, one newer approach to preaching is to go to the scripture for the form of the sermon as well as for the content. Still another approach is to use an inductive method now and then, where the meaning unfolds like the denouement of a plot. As a whole, however, this collection of sermons has content that is sturdy, varied and well-presented, and well worth the reading.

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Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., eds. Library of Religious Philosophy, Volume 1. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989. Pp. 236. \$29.95.

In the introduction to this volume, editors Ronald Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga call attention to the recent, and growing, collaboration between analytic philosophy and theology. Such collaboration between philosophers and theologians who are jointly interested in articulating the central articles of the Christian faith is most welcome. One evidence of this "young tradition" was a conference held in the spring of 1988 at Marquette University on the main Christian doctrines of Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement. This book contains the final versions of papers given at that conference.

There are eight essays in the book as well as an excellent introduction by the editors, impressive in its clarity and perceptiveness. The introduction goes well beyond an overview of the eight essays to an assessment of the theological/philosophical issues raised by the three key doctrines, a brief history of those doctrines, and deft refutations of some commonplace modern dismissals of the key doctrines.

The first three essays are on Trinity, a doctrine much maligned and/or ignored in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment theology but revived in importance and attention in recent decades. The essays by Cornelius Plantinga, David Brown, and Norman Kretzmann examine Trinitarian issues including the social analogy of the Trinity, the meaning of divine personhood, the nature of the divine unity, and the appropriation of divine attributes to particular divine persons. The authors of these essays differ in some important areas, but they share a commitment to careful contemporary articulation of this central doctrine.

The following two chapters focus on Christology. In essays by Ronald Feenstra and Thomas V. Morris, some of the most interesting and challenging problems of Christology emerge. Both scholars accept the main lines of Chalcedonian Christology and so both attempt to defend the one person-two natures doctrine of the Incarnation against its numerous contemporary attackers. Morris's rather startling model of the Incarnation is a "two-minds" model. That is, the incarnate Son of God has two distinct minds, one divine and one human. This model raises all the most pressing questions of the nature of a self or a person.

Feenstra's model of the Incarnation is entirely different. He believes the kenotic theory of the Incarnation best explains and satisfies the one person-two natures doctrine of Chalcedonian Christology. Feenstra recognizes the vigorous objections to kenosis, but believes these objections do not hold. He uses the attribute of omniscience as a test case for kenosis and demonstrates that a kenotically self-emptied Christ is, in fact, both fully divine and fully human.

The last three chapters address the doctrine of the Atonement, perhaps the most comprehensive of the primary Christian articles of faith. After all, one's atonement doctrine assumes a corresponding Trinity doctrine and Christology, as well as a corresponding anthropology, doctrine of sin, and doctrine of creation. Furthermore, atonement theology is rich in implications for community, sacraments, the shape of the Christian life, Holy Spirit doctrine, and eschatology. Because of all these connections and dependencies, as well as a certain anxiety and confusion about the meaning of salvation in current theology, careful and creative work on the Atonement is urgent.

The three essays by Philip Quinn, Eleonore Stump, and Colin Gunton explore various issues in atonement theology. Quinn's essay addresses the exceedingly difficult question of Christ's satisfaction for human sin. Quinn raises the crucial problems associated with satisfaction, explains how Thomas Aquinas deals with them, and then gives his own critique and modifications.

Eleonore Stump examines the relationship between the doctrines of justification by faith and the Atonement, two key doctrines whose relations are often not clarified. Stump draws out these lines of connection by using Harry Frankfurt's concepts of freedom and personhood. The final essay, by Colin Gunton, explores the controversial metaphor of sacrifice. He calls on the work of nineteenth-century Scottish theologian Edward Irving to forward his thesis that atonement, as uniquely expressed by the image of sacrifice, is at center the reconciliation of all creation to God.

Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement is an impressive and important book, which demonstrates convincingly the happy results of the cooperation between analytic philosophy and systematic theology.

LEANNE VAN DYK
Princeton Theological Seminary

Yirmiyahu Yovel. *Spinoza and Other Heretics*. Volume One: *The Marrano of Reason*. Pp. 244. Volume Two: *The Adventures of Immanence*. Pp. 225. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. \$45.00 the set.

In the presence of such an abundance of scholarly literature on the seventeenth-century Dutch metaphysician of Jewish-Portuguese descent, any ambition to disclose a hitherto concealed or merely neglected perspective basically amounts to casting the die in a gambling den. This notwithstanding, Yirmiyahu Yovel, Director of the International Spinoza Institute in Jerusalem, recently released two volumes on *Spinoza and Other Heretics* that met this uncommon challenge with a brilliant and masterful stroke of originality. There is very little doubt that Yovel's Spinoza will rank among the classic studies on the alternative way of thinking that a handful of learned people, mostly freethinkers and scientists, developed in the seventeenth century on the fringes of Christian and Jewish orthodoxies. Like a wildfire, this alternative way of thinking spread throughout Europe from West to East, subjugating one cultural center after another. Eventually it gave birth to the most decisive intellectual and sociopolitical achievement of modern times: secularism.

In 1632, at the time of Spinoza's death, the United Provinces were an ascending European Power which provided an asylum to dissenters of all persuasion. Formerly the Spanish Northern Low Countries, the independent United Provinces then were ruled by a mercantile and educated bourgeoisie. Amsterdam was assuming Antwerp's succession as Europe's financial centre. As a military power the Dutch successfully rivalled England at sea and France on the Continent. The Dutch schools of painting and architecture were eclipsing the Flemish schools and Dutch science was the envy of Europe. As Simon Schama pertinently remarked in his magnificent study of Dutch culture in the Golden Age, "the Republic was an island of plenty in an ocean of want" (*The Embarrassment of Riches*. New York: Knopf, 1987, p. 323). Prosperity and culture are the most compatible bedfellows when society allows for some degree of freedom. Thus, in spite of the victory of anti-Pelagian Calvinism over Arminianism, poets, critics, philosophers, political theorists, and scientists were building a Republic of Letters with the benevolent yet watchful consent of the ruling merchant class. It was there, in that small corner of Europe, that the Sephardi community became the most flourishing Jewish community in the western world. Paraphrasing Schama one might subjoin that the Republic was an island of moderate freedom in an ocean of religious fanaticism and political tyranny. Not long after Spinoza's death the European intellectual elite had finally begun to denounce prejudice and bigotry, to repudiate established religion, and to advocate a reasonable religion. At last, the Enlightenment was looming at the horizon. Spinoza, the first secular Jew, had been among its most crucial inspirers.

In the first volume, *The Marrano of Reason*, Yovel analyzes the psychocultural structure of the Marrano milieu in the Iberian peninsula and in Amsterdam where Spinoza was born and raised, and convincingly shows with a wealth of historical

evidences how the Dutch metaphysician assumed this distinctive legacy. It is indeed Yovel's chief contention that the main features of Spinoza's thought, namely the philosophy of immanence, the use of a dual language, and the ardent quest for an alternative way of salvation, all have their rootage in Marranism. The second volume, *The Adventures of Immanence*, retraces the influences of Spinoza's philosophy on the major exponents of modern thought: Kant, Hegel, Heine, Hess, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Einstein. Yovel superbly demonstrates that the secular salvation and the immanentism that most modern thinkers propounded were Spinoza's legacy. Owing to Yovel's stimulating argumentation, the reader finally realizes how modern a thinker Spinoza was, not only because of the contemporary relevance of such an alternative way of thinking, but also because these ideas were a source of inspiration to those who, like Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, shaped the psychocultural structure of our secular society. Both volumes are meticulous in scholarship, clear in argument, and fully accessible to the average learned public.

Unfairly taxed with atheism, Spinoza was vilified by his contemporaries. Much later the Romantics praised him as the God-besotted whose monism rejuvenated philosophy. To our postmodern times Spinoza has a twofold message: the intellectual love of God remains the highest alternative mode of piety, and any unqualified return to pre-Enlightenment patterns of belief resurrects dogmatism, sectarianism, and intolerance and fuels human prejudices and hatred.

JEAN-LOUP SEBAN

Princeton Theological Seminary

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990. Pp. xlviii + 1475. \$69.95.

One-volume commentaries on the Bible are popular and desirable. Since 1968 *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* has proved to be one of the most definitive and useful. Now the new version is an impressive indication of the advances in biblical research and the industriousness of the editors, since "about two-thirds" of the work is new. Nothing less would be expected from the distinguished editors, each of whom has served as president of both the Catholic Biblical Association and the Society of Biblical Literature.

The attractively produced volume is divided into two parts, covering seriatim each book in the Christian Bible including the Apocrypha. Significant cognate studies are "Hebrew Poetry," "Old Testament Apocalypticism and Eschatology," "Synoptic Problem," "Inspiration," "Canonicity," "Apocrypha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Other Jewish Literature," "Text and Versions," "Modern Old Testament Criticism," "Modern New Testament Criticism," "Hermeneutics," "Church Pronouncements," "Biblical Geography," "Biblical Archaeology," "A History of Israel," "Religious Institutions of Israel," "Aspects of Old Testament Thought," "Jesus,"

"Paul," "Early Church," "Aspects of New Testament Theology," "Pauline Theology," and "Johannine Theology." The chapters are written by recognized experts. Indicative of the balance and authority of the volume is the equal space allotted to historical setting and theological content. Impressive is the commitment to historical critical research and at the same time to the varied exegetical methods used by biblical scholars (esp. those that are new since 1968, viz., structuralism, deconstruction, rhetorical, narrative, sociological, psychoanalytic, and canonical criticism). The bibliographies and outlines that introduce the discussions add to the utility of the reference work.

There are numerous appealing features of the work. Hermeneutics is defined broadly, including the movement from intention to expression verbally and dynamically, and the process of translation (including the Gospels' communication of "Jesus' message not in his own Semitic tongue but in Greek"). The authors wisely help the reader to move from *sensus literalis* to *sensus spiritualis* without compromising the controls provided by biblical scholarship (there is also a clear avoidance of fundamentalism as well as any polemic against it). The present location of biblical exegesis is clarified by intermittent and special attention to the history of exegesis.

The exodus is not portrayed as historically inaccessible (*pace* M. Miller) but dated to 1250; the assessment of the conquest shows the difficulty offered by archaeology (*pace* Albright) and the lack of consensus among critical scholars (the *NJBC* gives more credence to Mendenhall's reconstruction).

It is gratifying to see an informed treatment of the so-called Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Rabbinics with a dual appreciation of the Jewish documents themselves and the Jewish background (= foreground) of earliest Christianity.

The hotly-debated synoptic problem is judiciously discussed by Neirynck, who admits the limitations in but superiority of the two-source hypothesis (Mt. and Lk. independently used Mk. and Q as well as unique sources). In harmony with this judgment Mark is placed at the beginning of the books in the New Testament to be discussed.

R. J. Dillon's treatment of Acts avoids the tendency to celebrate only the theology (*pace* Conzelmann, Haenchen) or the history (*pace* Hemer [1989]). He judges that the "we" is a stylistic device used by the author to show the validity of an eyewitness (as demanded by Polybius and Lucian) but that the traditions in Acts often are of "great historical value." 2 Thessalonians is now rightly judged to be pseudonymous (contrast *JBC* p. 228). The difficulty of dating Hebrews is clearly explained (and the bibliography includes Attridge [1989]).

The discussion of the historical Jesus by J. Meier is masterful; he admits the authenticity of the Josephan substratum, the need to avoid seeking what is unique to Jesus, the disturbing strangeness of Jesus, and most importantly stresses the fact that "there is simply too much historical and theologically relevant Gospel information about Jesus for scholars to ignore it" (p. 1318). In contrast to the *NJBC*, there is no section on the historical Jesus in the *JBC*.

More should certainly have been said about the essential nature of the dialogue among Jews and Christians (especially by scholars who know how the biblical evidence has been misunderstood and misused), the anti-Judaism inbedded in the New Testament, and the requisite of purifying preaching from supersessionism and denigrations of Judaism. The brief comment on p. 948 is wise, but surely something must be said about the problems encountered when translating *Ioudaioi* (which certainly does not always mean "Jews") especially in John.

The relation of the the testaments deserves a separate and focused discussion, and the comments shared (esp. on pp. 1157, 1160) are insightful but scarcely do justice to the hundreds of "intertestamental" Jewish documents that recast earlier discussions. It is distressing to find outdated and impossible phrases or concepts such as "realized eschatology" (p. 959). The discussion of archaeology is authoritative, but fails to include the evidence of first-century synagogues in Palestine, and does not help the reader struggle with the tenuous link between archaeological discoveries and informed faith.

In summary, this is one of the most valuable reference works now available. Reading it in preparation for sermons or for edification will help the minister or teacher remain abreast of recent developments in biblical studies. The work is a monument to the outstanding advancement made by scholars, especially Roman Catholics. The *NJBC* is vastly improved over the *JBC*.

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